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How Evangelicals Became White

by Kelly Brown Douglas



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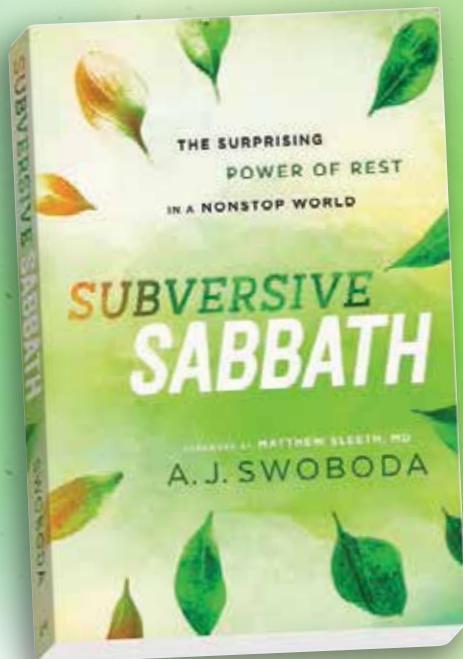
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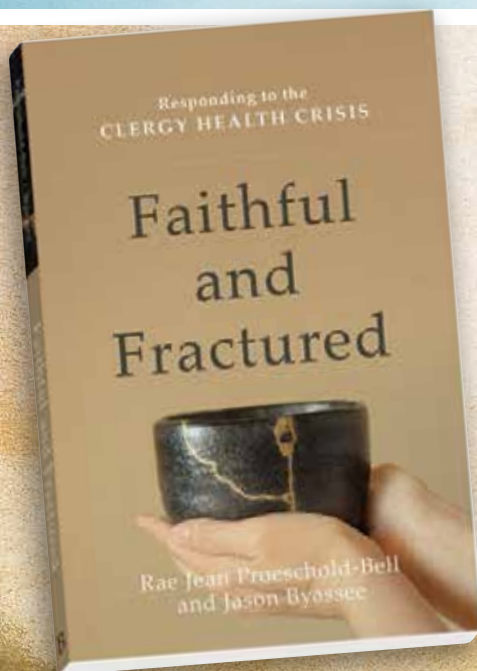


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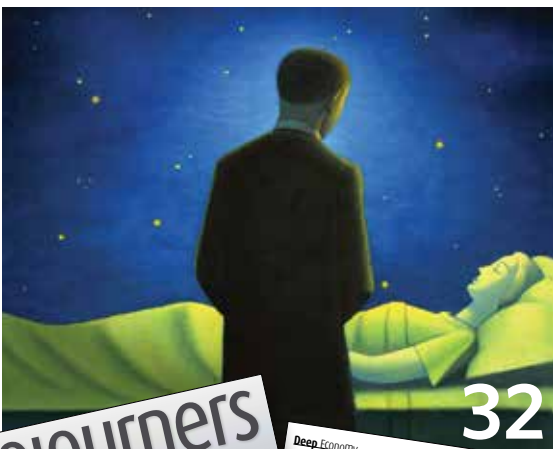
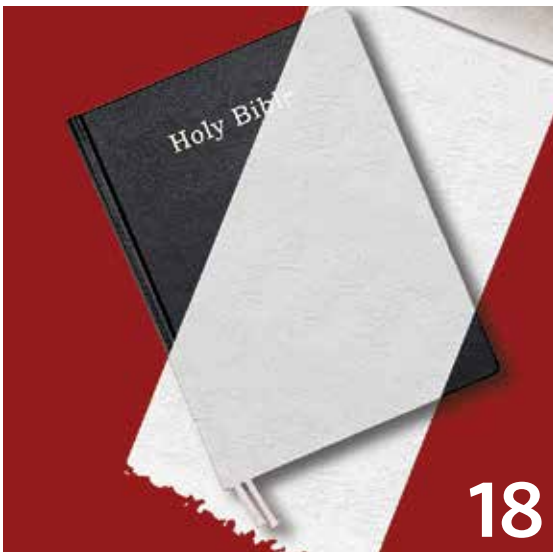
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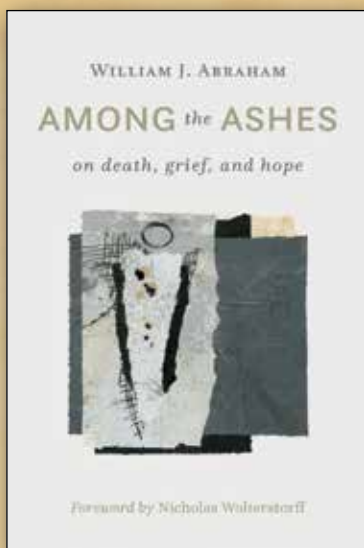
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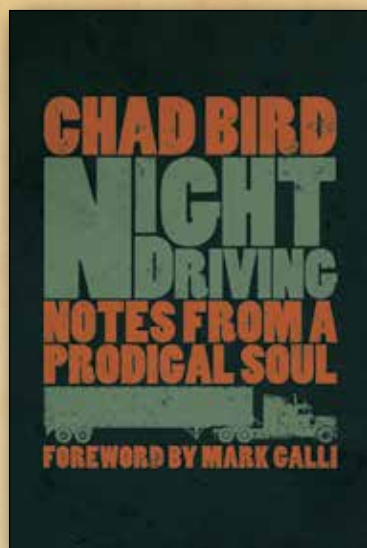
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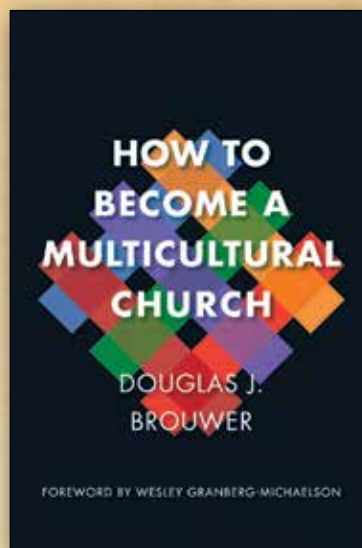




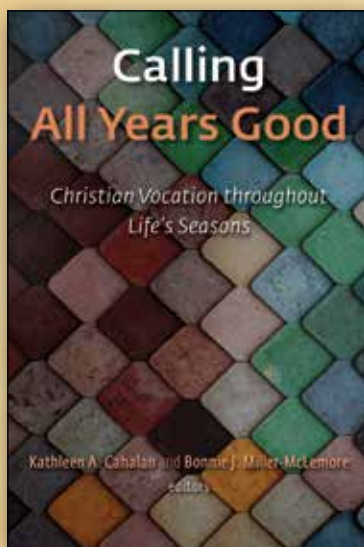
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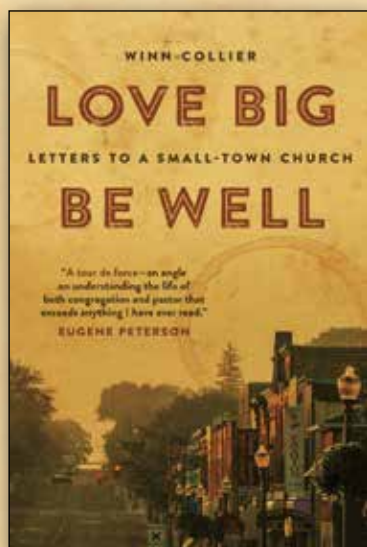
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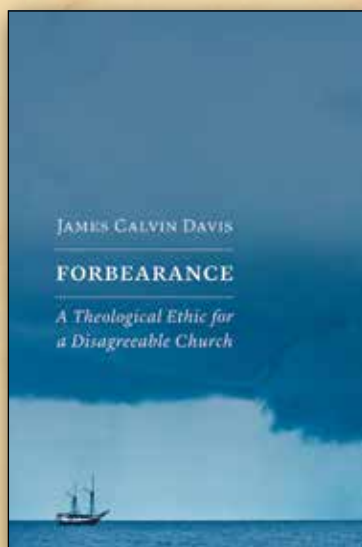
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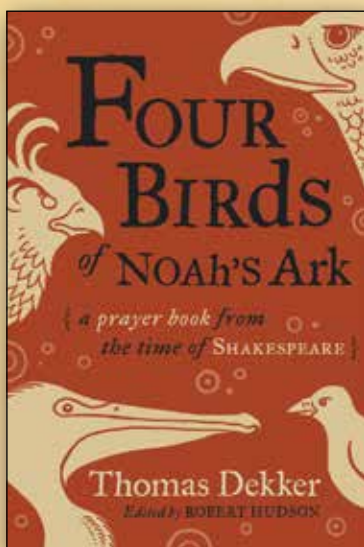
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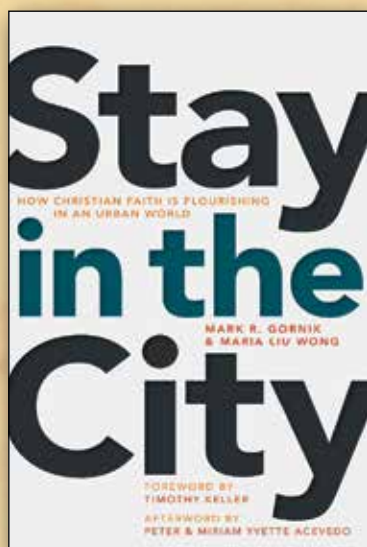
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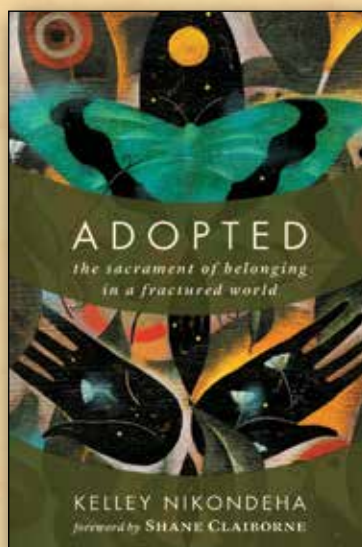
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IN THIS ISSUE, Victoria Newton Ford writes about Ava DuVernay's forthcoming movie adaptation of Madeleine L'Engle's bestselling fantasy novel *A Wrinkle in Time*. As in the book, Meg Murry travels through time to find her missing father. But DuVernay, who also directed *Selma* (2014) and *13th* (2016), adds a twist. In the film, Meg and her brother, Charles Wallace, are black. For Ford, this delivers something the novel cannot: "a hero of the universe who, in our current political space and time, is afforded the least agency." In other words, writes Ford, "Meg is an angry black girl."

A film that depicts a black protagonist—in all her fury, pain, and love—is

especially radical, Ford explains, because America has continually "sought to conscript ... black [women] into a toolbox for the country's deliverance." She points to the political heroization of Oprah, Michelle Obama, and the black women voters in Alabama who defeated Roy Moore's senatorial bid.

But when we demand that black women be saviors, it lets the people Katherine Webb-Henn describes as "politically apathetic Christians" off the hook. In "Faith and the Apathetic Voter," Webb-Henn reports a disturbing trend: people of faith, like the



guy who owns her local coffee shop, who choose to simply opt out of the political process "because no one candidate or platform neatly marries to his religious principles or community-approved ethical code."

This poses a serious question: "If our beliefs paralyze us from participating in the systems affecting *us all*," writes Webb-Henn, "if they blind us from the ways these systems have power to harm or help our neighbors, then what good are they?" An important thing to consider, we think, as we approach this year's midterm elections. ■

Letters

The Present Political Quagmire

The February 2018 issue raises big questions for our country and the evangelical church. The authors of "Is This a Bonhoeffer Moment?" (Lori Brandt Hale and Reggie L. Williams) and "Who Is Jesus for Us Today?" (Wesley Granberg-Michaelson) rightly point out the risks of making parallels between two different historical contexts (Germany in the 1930s and 21st century America). Yet there are striking similarities, particularly the ease with which evangelical Christians, in America today and in Germany then, accepted populist movements and their nationalistic programs. In both cases, the populist forces were able to exploit societal anxieties and make a sentimental appeal to a cultural form of Christianity that served its purposes.

The slogan of the Nazified German Christians was "Germany our goal, Christ our power!" Based on a distorted interpretation of Lutheran theology, a group of theologians at the time issued a document, known as the Ansbacher Ratschlag, opposing the Barmen Declaration. It was addressed to the National Socialist Evangelical Union of Pastors and included this statement: "... we as believing Christians thank the Lord God that in this hour of need he has given our people the Fuhrer as a 'good and faithful sovereign,' and that in the Nationalistic Socialist state

"We thank the Lord God for giving our people the Fuhrer as a 'good and faithful sovereign.'"

he is endeavoring to provide us with disciplined and honorable 'good government.'" This distant mirror of attitudes—and even words—that are with us today should give Christians great concern. The vulnerability of the American church did not come about in the presidential election of November 2016. The present political quagmire has only exposed it.

Dave Shelman
Corbett, Oregon

Acknowledging Assault

I have just read "A Terrorist War Against Women," by Serene Jones (February 2018). Reading stories of sexual violence against women gives me hope that something can be done about that evil. But there is one voice that is not heard too often. It is that of sexual violence against men by male authority figures. I suspect there are many men out there who trusted a male authority figure and were assaulted. We are hurting.

Anonymous

Please Check

"Like a Good Neighbor," by Bill McKibben (February 2018), reminded me of the need

to know our neighbors in this age. I am a senior lady who has lived in a complex for the past 27 years. I know one neighbor out of the 12 in my building. I have told many, "If you do not see me or hear from me for three days, please check to make sure I am still alive." They all laugh, but it has been true over the years: Seniors and some younger folks have died and no one knew until there was an odor in the building. Thank you for the article.

Barbara R. Lee
Brighton, Michigan

Where Anthony Resided

It appears that Courtney Hall Lee, in "Where the Spirit Calls" (February 2018), confused the home of Elizabeth Cady Stanton with that of Susan B. Anthony. It was Stanton who lived in Seneca Falls, not Anthony. Anthony lived in Rochester. I've made pilgrimages to both homes!

Susie Stanley
Reading, Pennsylvania

"On the other hand ..." Write to letters@sojo.net or *Letters, Sojourners*, 408 C Street NE, Washington, DC 20002. Include your name, city, and state. Letters may be edited.

BY JIM WALLIS

Faith, Justice, and the Law



WHEN I RECENTLY spoke at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Mich., on the subject of my book *America's Original Sin*, the moderator introduced me with something that isn't in my official bio. "Our speaker today has been arrested 22 times."

It's up to 23 times now, after I was arrested in December in the Hart Senate Office Building for reading biblical passages about poverty to protest the GOP tax plan, which disproportionately favors the rich.

In Shane Claiborne's piece in this issue, he provides an overview of civil disobedience—both the biblical basis for disobeying unjust laws and how people doing so, often at great risk, have changed the course of history again and again. I want to share a few of my own reflections on civil disobedience.

In late 1983, on the heels of the Reagan administration's inva-

sion of a U.S. invasion—with a credible promise to mobilize tens of thousands to engage in principled law-breaking all over America—hoping that might make decision-makers reconsider. It worked. In the end, the United States did not send troops to directly invade Nicaragua (the Iran-contra scandal and the U.S.-paid mercenaries is a story for another time). Later, we got reliable information that the Pledge of Resistance was a significant factor in the White House decision not to invade.

CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE is just one tactic in the toolbox of social change, and it exists along a continuum of protest. It should be something we are willing to undertake when the stakes are high enough to demand such action and other tactics have been exhausted.

Civil disobedience on occasion has been the culmination of broader movements around particular justice and peace commitments. For example, for decades Sojourners helped lead faith-based national campaigns to stop and reverse the Cold War nuclear arms race. We focused on bringing needed biblical and theological reflection to the public debates, including producing study guides that were used by hundreds of thousands of people in churches across the U.S. Our writing, speaking, and acting engaged Christians across the country, so that when Congress debated dangerous first-strike nuclear weapons in 1983, we were ready to respond with what at the time was the largest civil disobedience action in Washington since the Vietnam War, as 242 of us were arrested for singing and praying in the U.S. Capitol.

People often come up to me and say, "I was arrested with you!"

Many who have joined Sojourners in civil disobedience have learned that it can indeed change history, but it can be deeply transformational on a personal level as well. When middle-class white people find themselves inside a jail cell for the first time, on the wrong side of the law they were raised to obey, it can be an emotional and life-changing experience.

Of course, many people of color have had those experiences throughout their lives, and civil disobedience actions conducted by people of color are often treated in much more brutal ways. Consequently, when white people choose to engage in civil disobedience, they need to do so while fully recognizing their privilege and commit to using that privilege constructively.

FROM PROTESTS AT the nuclear weapons test site in Nevada and arrests at the South African embassy to oppose apartheid, from actions at the State Department against U.S. wars in Central America and torture and blocking illegal evictions of low-income people in our own neighborhoods—we have learned a great deal over the years about faith, justice, and the law.

In our current climate, my prayer is that we will gather the lessons many of us have learned over the years about when and how civil disobedience is appropriate and necessary and be ready to act when circumstances call for it. Inevitably, there will be moments ahead when nonviolent, prayerful civil disobedience will be part of the way forward. It seems inescapable, given the injustice and dangers we see in America and the rest of the world. My 23rd arrest this winter is unlikely to be my last. ■

Jim Wallis is editor-in-chief of Sojourners magazine.

Civil disobedience can be a critical tactic in the toolbox of social change.

sion of Grenada, church leaders in Nicaragua called Sojourners and pleaded with us to help stop the invasion of their country, rightly fearing that the U.S. would target Nicaragua next. We asked ourselves, What can we do?

After much prayer and discernment, and in collaboration with many allies in the Christian peace movement, we launched "The Pledge of Resistance," wherein Christians across the United States "pledged" to fill the offices of their members of Congress in massive civil disobedience if Nicaragua were invaded. Eighty thousand people eventually signed the pledge. Most of the signers were prepared to be arrested and go to jail if necessary.

Our hope in creating this pledge was to increase the domestic cost



Activists staged a sit-in in this winter in the Rayburn Building on Capitol Hill to protest the GOP tax bill.

Drew Angerer/Getty Images

By Sarah Anderson

Who Pays for Tax Cuts?

Tax cuts for middle-class Americans come at a painfully high price.

THIS TAX DAY, some middle-class Americans may be tempted to celebrate. Under the new law approved in December, the bottom 60 percent of earners (those making less than \$86,100 a year) are expected to receive 2018 tax cuts worth \$407 on average.

But if you think you'll be among those who owe Uncle Sam less under the new law, don't get your party hat out yet. These tax cuts come at a high price.

For example, a typical preschool teacher (single, with no children) who makes \$30,000 per year can expect a tax cut of \$457. That's enough to pay for a new refrigerator or several months of electricity bills. But other changes to the tax code could put this teacher's job in jeopardy. State governments have been expanding pre-K programs in recent decades, but many of them are expected to have their education budgets squeezed because of the new tax

law's caps on state and local tax deductions.

In the meantime, the preschool teacher could have more hungry children in her classroom. The new tax law reduces incentives for charitable contributions, including for food banks and other services that early-childhood programs rely on. Donations to

The GOP budget proposal includes \$1 trillion in cuts to Medicaid.

nonprofits are expected to drop by as much as \$20 billion this year, according to the Tax Policy Center.

What about middle-class families who are making significantly more than the typical preschool teacher? Let's look at a couple who run a plumbing business in Louisiana, with \$135,000 in joint income. The Tax Policy Center estimates they'll get a tax cut of \$609 in 2018. But that same couple can

expect to be slammed with a spike in their health insurance premiums of \$1,900—*triple* their tax cut! That's because the new tax law repealed a key part of the Affordable Care Act that requires individuals to have health coverage if they can afford it. This could lead to an estimated 13 million more people becoming uninsured and huge increases in premiums for those who remain in the individual market.

These are just some of the immediate effects of a tax law that overwhelmingly favors the wealthy and big corporations. In the longer term, the costs to working families will be much more painful.

Individual tax cuts are scheduled to expire after 2025, while the big-ticket item in the new tax law—the slashing of the corporate tax rate from 35 to 21 percent—is intended to be permanent. This huge giveaway to corporations will cost \$1.4 trillion over 10 years, which Republicans would

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like to pay for through cuts to Medicare, Medicaid, and other vital public services. The GOP budget proposal includes \$473 billion in cuts to Medicare and \$1 trillion in cuts to Medicaid.

While this Tax Day offers little for most Americans to celebrate, thanks to the new law big corporations will have piles of money they no longer have to contribute to boring stuff like schools and bridges.

What are they planning to splurge on? For Imelda Marcos, it was shoes. For these guys, it's stock buybacks. This shady financial maneuver artificially inflates the value of a company's stock, which is guaranteed to put wealthy shareholders and executives in a festive mood while doing nothing to benefit workers. So far, corporations have

announced plans to spend more than \$70 billion on these stock buybacks.

Of course, today's corporate executives have learned that to stay on top, you've got to show a bit of concern for the little people. That's why some corporations are handing out employee bonuses. Unfortunately, these checks for lower-level employees—just like their tax cuts—are a temporary perk meant to mask deeper costs.

The corporate tax cuts—unless we repeal them—will feed a party for the 1 percent that never ends. ■

Sarah Anderson (@Anderson_IPS) directs the Global Economy Project and co-edits Inequality.org at the Institute for Policy Studies.

By Paul Scherz

Here Come the Robots

Your next caregiver could be an android.

RECENT STATEMENTS by tech luminaries suggest that robots with artificial intelligence (AI) are on the cusp of conquering the world. These fears are slightly overblown—researchers assure us that we are nowhere near “conscious” AI. More important, these apocalyptic predictions distract us from the problems that Christian ethics finds in existing forms of automation.

These problems arise from the replacement of central aspects of human existence for the sake of efficiency and convenience. Most obviously, automation leads to the replacement of workers, decimating not only manufacturing jobs but also white-collar jobs as AI becomes more sophisticated. Self-driving cars alone threaten 4 million jobs. While economists predict new employment opportunities, tech executives are less confident, leading to calls for a universal basic income.

Automation is also replacing inconvenient forms of relationship. In *Alone Together*, Sherry Turkle documents substitutes for relational labor that involve nurturing or therapy, such as robot caregivers for the elderly. Many people embrace these automated caregivers, projecting emotions upon them and

sometimes preferring them to humans.

The turn from relationships is increasingly widespread in society. Internet algorithms provide us with a world that reflects ourselves back to us—movies, news, and friends already tailored to our interests. It is easy to understand this turn toward technology: Relationships can be difficult. They involve inconvenient emotions, unrestricted demands, and challenging points of view.

Automation even challenges that most troubling of relations, our own embodiment. Emerging from René Descartes' philosophy that saw the body as mere mechanism and unnecessary for our identity, artificial intelligence suggests we can live a disembodied existence, such as some transhumanists' longing to upload themselves to a computer. While transhumanism is a fringe movement, devices encourage more and more people to live with their attention drawn away from the embodied present.

By focusing on efficiency and convenience at the expense of difficult but true human goods, these technological developments participate in what Popes Francis and

**Self-driving cars
alone threaten
4 million jobs.**

From the Archives

April 1977

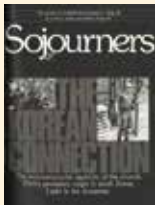
At Home with the Victims

NO LONGER do I have to separate myself from the victims of society, whether they are in prisons or mental institutions, or the economically poor, unable to buy time, health, space, leisure, education for their children, or a host of other things. I know myself to be victimized, because I am the victim of these powers. I can be at home with other victims.

And I need no longer to be bound by the hurt of ancient wounds in my own life because the penetrating light of Christ can pierce the darkness—the deepest darkness. And no longer need I fear the aging process. It has no destructive power over me. My diminishing powers and your diminishing powers in certain areas are the preparation for a new depth of communion with God, for which I was destined. Death, which believes that I am its victim, will be as thwarted with me as it was with my Lord Jesus Christ, who slipped out from under its control.

The ultimate call on the life of the Christian is to build a faith community. That's the revolutionary act. And to let its own interior life be changed and nurtured and increasingly freed from the principalities, institutions, from antichrist against which the human being in his own and her own power is totally and absolutely impotent. It's the power of Jesus Christ, which is the power to save. ■

Gordon Cosby was pastor of Church of the Saviour in Washington, D.C., when this article appeared.



John Paul II have called the “technocratic paradigm,” the throwaway culture, or the culture of death.

These technologies can mislead us as to how to achieve a good life. Work ought not be merely a way to earn money for consumption, but a way to contribute to the common good and find meaning in our lives. Unemployment costs far more than a paycheck, as the rising number of “deaths of despair” indicates.

Further, humans are made for relations with others. In the Trinity, relation underlies all existence. While relationships can be difficult, it is precisely these troubling aspects that change us for the better. Others’ pain and difficulty drive us to transcend selfish concerns. The primordial sin, pride, is the denial of relationship, the turning away from God and others to the self.

Our body is not a neutral tool to use or discard at will. Through the incarnation, God took on a human body and all the weakness and limitations such a body entails. Our

bodies are central to our eternal fate, since, from the earliest creeds, Christians have awaited the resurrection of the body.

These problems do not mean that Christians should reject automation. Technological developments can be a gift from God, but we must remain aware that both good and bad aspects of our culture become embedded in artifacts, possibly perpetuating misconceptions.

Cultural renewal may require changing our technology, sometimes even rejecting certain technologies. Most often, it will demand changes in design, such as forms of automation that assist rather than replace human workers. We should encourage the many researchers and engineers who are seeking better forms of technology, as well as take care in how we use our own devices. ■

Paul Scherz is an assistant professor of moral theology/ethics at The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C.

By Jennifer L. Hawks

Keep Our Churches Purple

The Johnson Amendment was almost a victim of the Republican tax overhaul.

PURPLE IS THE liturgical color for Lent. “Purple” is also the political identity of America’s houses of worship. We are a mixture of Republicans, Democrats, and independents who come together for worship, fellowship, and service. No political party owns religious truth.

In 2017, some in Washington, D.C., made a concerted effort to undermine churches’ congregational political mix through the repeal of the Johnson Amendment, a provision in the tax code since 1954 that protects the independence and integrity of not-for-profit organizations by prohibiting them from endorsing or opposing candidates for public office.

The Johnson Amendment does not specifically target churches; it applies equally to *all* 501(c)(3) organizations, religious and secular. Under the current tax code, churches are assumed to be 501(c)(3) organizations (c3s) but can opt for another tax-exempt status. Most churches remain c3s because in addition to being tax exempt,

congregants’ tithes and offerings are tax deductible. Despite some hysterical claims, churches and charitable organizations can address any issue—no matter how controversial or unpopular—under the current tax code. The line is drawn, however, at c3 organizations telling people who to vote for or against.

During the fall debate on the largest change to the U.S. tax code in 30 years, the House version of the tax bill would have effectively repealed the Johnson Amendment. The Senate version never included such language, nor did the final version of the bill that became law.

We might have seen the end of this long-standing tax provision if not for the outcry from nonprofits, foundations, and people of faith. Can you imagine? Candidate commercials played during worship services. Candidate flyers included in every bag of food given out by the local food pantry.

Congress’ independent nonpartisan analyst testified that permitting churches and

charities to endorse political candidates would incentivize wealthy political donors to funnel some of their political contributions through the charitable sector to get a tax deduction.

The pressure local, state, and federal political operatives would place on churches and charities would be devastating to our witness and ministries. The partisan taint from sham churches and charities established solely to endorse candidates would be inescapable. Repealing the Johnson Amendment would forever alter nonprofits in the U.S. and how they serve the common good. The nonprofit and religious communities must continue telling Congress that the Johnson Amendment strikes the right balance. Churches are permitted to speak boldly on issues while keeping above the dysfunction rampant in partisan politics.

A diverse coalition of more than 100 Christian and non-Christian religious denominations sent a letter to Congress saying they neither need nor want a change. "Current law serves as a valuable safeguard for the integrity of our charitable sector and campaign finance system," they wrote.

Many Christians of all theological stripes support the Johnson Amendment because our Savior cannot be reduced to a political party, platform, candidate, or agenda. Ushering partisanship into our pews will only hinder our ability to be the hands and feet of Christ. Religious communities support the Johnson Amendment because pulpits should be prophetic—not bought and paid for by political operatives.

Our elected officials have held the partisan hounds at bay for now. But some in Congress will try again. When the next attempt to repeal the Johnson Amendment arises, will Congress protect churches and charitable organizations or forever alter them?

Churches support the Johnson Amendment because current law protects churches' prophetic witness. Partisan political fights would distract from the mission to inspire congregations to love as God loves, give as God gives, and forgive as God forgives. Let's keep our churches purple. ■

Rev. Jennifer L. Hawks is associate general counsel at the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty in Washington, D.C.

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verse of the day

But God proves [God's] love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.
- Romans 5:8

voice of the day

God does not love some ideal person, but rather human beings just as we are, not some ideal world, but rather the real world.
- Dietrich Bonhoeffer

prayer of the day

Teach us to approach you without trying to hide, O God, for your love covers our sins.

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PHOTO



Father Ismael Moreno (center), a Jesuit priest and director of Radio Progreso, speaks about human rights in Honduras.

Sean T. Hawkey

Confronting the Powers

When Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernández was sworn into a second term Jan. 27, the highly disputed November election caused protesters to fill the streets. In the midst of violent clashes, British photojournalist Sean T. Hawkey captured images of Honduran clergy and human rights groups taking part in ecumenical vigils outside the U.S. Embassy in Honduras' capital, Tegucigalpa. See the full photo essay at sojo.net/honduras.

QUOTED

“Jesus has left your church when a woman is assaulted but only men are allowed to speak publicly about it.”

—Angela Denker
sojo.net/denker

NEWS

Is ICE Targeting Activists?

Under the Trump administration, the number of arrests made by Immigrations and Customs Enforcement has surged. But lately, the agency may have added a new tactic: targeting immigrant rights activists for detention and, in one case, deportation. In recent months, at least four immigration rights leaders have been detained by ICE, a strategy that many believe is intended to pressure undocumented activists to keep quiet. For the most recent updates on these activists—and the faith leaders defending them—visit sojo.net.



Vimeo

December 2017:

Maru Mora-Villalpando, a nationally known immigrant rights leader, receives a notice to appear in immigration court.

Jan. 10, 2018: ICE agents raid nearly 100 7-Eleven stores and make 21 arrests.

Jan. 11: ICE agents detain immigrant rights activist Ravi Ragbir, the executive director of the New Sanctuary Coalition of New York.



Charles Eckert



Jan. 12: ICE agents detain Eliseo Jurado, whose wife is seeking sanctuary inside a church; he was arrested outside of a grocery store in Colorado.

Jan. 16: Jean Montrevil of the New Sanctuary Coalition in New York City is deported to Haiti.



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It Didn't Start with Donald Trump

A WHITE EVANGELICAL leader recently asked me how white supremacy shaped Republicanism. The truth is this: Belief in the supremacy of whiteness has shaped both parties and all facets of life in the United States.

The Grand Old Party wasn't always synonymous with bold-faced bigotry. In fact, it wasn't even synonymous with the South. The party of Lincoln was crafted in the North in 1854 to counter the expansion of Southern slavocracy into new territories.

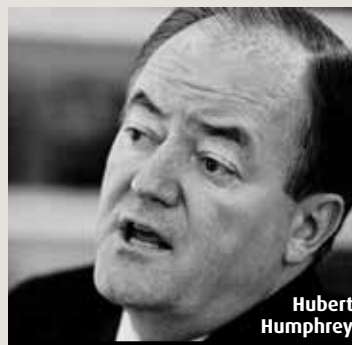
As the only surviving party from the nation's founding, Democrats—based in the South—were keepers of the status quo, maintaining the health of the nation's nascent systems and structures. The two parties morphed into the two sides of the Civil War: the Union (Lincoln's Republicans) and the Confederacy (Southern Democrats).

Lincoln's GOP won and spent the first several post-war years reordering the landscape of power in the U.S.: They outlawed the 246-year-old American economic engine

workers by lowering bars of criminality and focusing enforcement on communities of color. Between 1877 and 1950, more than 4,000 black bodies swung from trees across the South while white mobs rioted, massacring black men, women, and children with impunity in states across the Midwest and Upper Midwest.

Then there was a shift.

Hubert Humphrey stepped to the podium to offer the minor-



Hubert Humphrey

ity plank of the Democratic Party platform at the convention of 1948. Following the lead of activists such as Ida B. Wells and A. Philip Randolph and fueled by the global human rights movement in the wake

of the Holocaust, Humphrey called for anti-lynching laws, an end to seg-

regation and job discrimination, and a civil rights act to be included in the Democratic Party platform that year.

He won. All points from Humphrey's minority plank were included in the Democratic platform that year.

Southern Democrats revolted. An estimated 36 of them formed their own party—the Dixiecrats—which promised to maintain white supremacy by preserving states' rights to segregate and discriminate based on race. The Dixiecrats flailed and eventually

rejoined the Democratic Party, but the 1964 passage of the Civil Rights Act was too much for them. Most Southern senators voted against it.

If 1964 was too much, then the 1965 Voting Rights Act was humiliation. White Southerners left the Democratic Party en masse.

Barry Goldwater, then Richard Nixon, spent the next decade courting dislocated Southern Democrats to the GOP. Dog-whistle politics replaced bullhorn bigotry. Calls for "law and order" promised protection from "lawbreaking" civil rights activism. Calls for states' rights transformed into calls against busing—code for integration of schools. And the pictures of dusty-eyed white poverty, the ones that moved us to approve Johnson's War on Poverty, were dissolved by images of welfare queens driving Cadillacs in urban ghettos.

By 1980, many white Southerners in the South and those who had migrated to the Midwest, West, and North had found their home in the Republican Party. They have been there ever since.

In the 1980s, evangelicals exchanged vows with Ronald Reagan, crafter of the welfare queen trope, and the Republican Party; since then, they have been in love with trickle-down economics and dog-whistle politics designed to protect and defend the assumed natural right of white men to rule the world.

The election of Donald Trump has not birthed something new in the Republican Party. It has only pushed the party's late 20th century white supremacist agenda and its operatives to the fore, to lead us all. ■

Lisa Sharon Harper, author of The Very Good Gospel, is founder and president of FreedomRoad.us.



Dog-whistle politics replaced bullhorn bigotry.

known as slavery, removed race as a determining factor of citizenship, and expanded the right to vote to all male citizens, regardless of race. Formerly enslaved Africans in the U.S. flourished. An estimated 2,000 were elected to public offices across the country—as high as lieutenant governor—and several won seats in the U.S. Senate. But their streak ended when federal troops were pulled out of the South.

Over the next couple of decades, Southern Democrats mounted a legal, social, and political civil war to re-establish white male supremacy in the South. Peonage laws filled former plantations with convict-leased

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She Shall Prophecy

Produced by our Women and Girls Campaign, this newsletter helps elevate the voices of women faith leaders by every month spotlighting a sermon from a woman somewhere in the world. The newsletter also connects readers to opportunities to faithfully take action for women and girls. Learn how your church can combat domestic and sexual violence, find out how to engage your representatives on issues of gender justice, and receive sermons and prayers to inspire and sustain you.



Welcoming the Stranger

Sign up for the Welcoming the Stranger newsletter and you will get monthly updates from the Sojourners Immigration Campaign. With the latest policy updates, news stories, Sojourners' commentary, and more, Welcoming the Stranger is a resource for advocates, faith leaders, and all those who seek to heed Jesus' words: "I was a stranger, and you welcomed me."

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A Sunrise Movement training in Philadelphia.

Sunrise Movement

The Politics of Generation Z

IF YOU'RE LOOKING for the climate movement this year, you'll find it at city councils arguing for 100 percent renewable energy, at pension boards demanding fossil fuel divestment, and in farm fields trying to block pipelines. But you'll also need to track down a few ramshackle houses in swing states across the country.

Those houses will hold hundreds of young people—at least it will hold them late at night, once they're done with the long work of knocking on doors, handing out voter guides, and going to rallies. These “movement houses” are the most visible face of

Amherst, said in an interview last summer. But then came that fateful November day, and “our world turned upside-down.” Now it wasn't about pushing Clinton harder—it was about pushing back against the desperate threat that Trump represented: to the Constitution, to vulnerable people, and to the climate, which can't wait a decade or two for sanity to return to our national life. “When the dust settled we came to an important realization: We have to figure out how to win elections.”

There's been an increasing tide of youth electoral organizing in recent years, much of it focused around climate change, a crucial issue for new voters. Tom Steyer's NextGen America, for instance, poured resources into this effort in the last electoral cycle, and it worked: Clinton didn't win, but she did very well in the college precincts that Steyer's troops targeted. As Ben Wessel, who helped lead the NextGen effort, put it: “In millennial-majority precincts, turnout was up and support for Clinton was on par with Obama in 2012.” In other words, don't blame the kids.

I got to see that work up close, speaking and canvassing with college students

across Ohio and Pennsylvania during the waning days of the Clinton campaign. It's not easy—standing on the quad with a clipboard trying to register young people is a reminder that civic life is in some ways foreign to many of the next generation. They have seen too many disappointing politicians, and been disappointed when the politicians they did trust (Bernie!) were squeezed out.

But whenever they turn out to vote—in last year's Virginia primaries, for instance—they show the generosity of spirit that marks what we're now calling the post-millennial generation (Generation Z, if you're going alphabetically). They're dramatically open to new ideas and new people, willing to break the stale molds of American politics.

Which is why it's so sweet to imagine the conversations in those “movement houses” at day's end, as young people struggle to come to terms with the politics of the present and start creating the politics of the future, one precinct at a time. ■

Bill McKibben, a Sojourners contributing editor, is the Schumann Distinguished Scholar at Middlebury College in Vermont and founder of 350.org.



“We have to figure out how to win elections.”

the Sunrise Movement, one of those reminders that even the poisonous politics of our moment holds real possibilities.

The young people who founded Sunrise weren't actually anticipating a Trump victory. “We had had a plan to focus on building popular support for climate change, anticipating that a Democratic president would be pushed to take action on climate if a majority of Americans wanted it and made enough noise,” Varshini Prakash, the group's engaging spokeswoman who cut her teeth as a highly successful divestment activist at UMass

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How Evangelicals Became

WHITE

by KELLY BROWN DOUGLAS

By linking Anglo-Saxonism with godliness, evangelical Christianity has been complicit in promoting a “great” America that is equated with white supremacy.

WHAT VALUES WERE really at stake for the 81 percent of white evangelicals who voted for a presidential candidate who uses crass language and admits to engaging in coarse behavior, and whose campaign was marked by vitriolic hatred of various people, particularly people of color?

I raised this question with a white male leader of a Christian foundation. In response, he told me to consider the “moral values”—such as pro-life concerns—that he said prompted, if not demanded, white evangelical support of Donald Trump’s candidacy.

The Christian leader suggested that these particular concerns mitigated any misgivings that white evangelicals might have with Trump’s dissolute behaviors and bigoted views. For many others, the moral imperatives *not* to support Trump were more overriding, especially for those who prioritize personal virtue as a core religious value.

To safeguard the Anglo-Saxon vision, a pervasive culture of whiteness was born.

The “value proposition” displayed by white evangelicals in the 2016 election, and the definition of what constitutes “moral values” and what doesn’t, is inextricably related to the nation’s upcoming demographic shift—the fact that, by the year 2044, the United States is expected to become majority nonwhite. This has significant implications for the wider faith community regarding issues of race. Much more may be at stake than the leader of the Christian foundation was able or willing to recognize.

‘The new Israelites’

The value proposition of the Trump campaign was made clear in the campaign’s “Make America Great Again” vision. This mantra tapped into America’s defining Anglo-Saxon myth and revitalized the culture of white supremacy constructed to protect it.

The Anglo-Saxon myth was introduced to this country when America’s Pilgrim and Puritan forebears fled England, intent on carrying forth an Anglo-Saxon legacy they believed was compromised in English church and society with the Norman Conquest in 1066. These early Americans believed themselves descendants of an ancient Anglo-Saxon people, “free from the taint of intermarriages,” who uniquely possessed high moral values and an “instinctive love for freedom.” Their beliefs reflected the thought of first-century Roman philosopher Tacitus (quoted above), who touted the unique superiority of an Anglo-Saxon people from the ancient woods of Germany. In his treatise *Germania*, Tacitus describes these Germanic tribes as a people for whom “good [moral] habits” were more effectual than “good laws” and argues that they possess a peculiar respect for individual rights and freedom.

Tacitus’ writings not only played an influential role in determining systems of governance in America, but they also laid the foundation for the subjugation, if not elimination, of certain peoples: namely, those who were not members of the “unmixed race” that Tacitus described. Indeed, *Germania* has been called “one of the most dangerous books ever written,” not so much for what Tacitus wrote but for how his words have been used to undergird horrific movements, such as the Nazis’ monstrous program for “racial purity.”

Considering themselves descendants of these mythic Anglo-Saxon people, the Puritans and Pilgrims crossed the Atlantic with a vision to build a nation that was politically and culturally—if not demographically—true to their “exceptional” Anglo-Saxon heritage.

They saw this as a divine vision. They traced their Anglo-Saxon heritage through the ancient woods of

Germany back to the Bible. They considered themselves the “new Israelites,” carrying forth a godly mission. Central to this mission was building not simply an Anglo-Saxon nation but a religious nation—one that reflected the morals and virtues of God, which in their minds were synonymous with the unsullied ways of their freedom-loving Anglo-Saxon ancestors. “The Lord will make [America] a city upon a hill,” Puritan leader John Winthrop preached in 1630, “[with] the eyes of all people upon us.”

From its beginning, America’s social-identity, with a legitimating religious canopy, was Anglo-Saxon. Even Founding Fathers such as Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin envisioned America as a sacred witness to Anglo-Saxon character and values, if not people. (Jefferson wrote, “Tacitus I consider as the first writer in the world without a single exception.”)

Jefferson’s proposed language for a United States seal affirmed this belief. As John Adams described it, Jefferson’s seal included “the children of Israel in the wilderness ... and on the other side, Hengist and Horsa, the Saxon chiefs from whom we claim the honor of being descended, and whose political principles and form of government we have assumed.” America’s democracy was conceived of as an expression of a biblically ordained Anglo-Saxon mission.

A whitewashed ‘city on the hill’

Anglo-Saxon America had a perpetually vexing problem. Anglo-Saxons were not native to American soil. Those native to American soil were decidedly not Anglo-Saxon. And not everybody who *looked* like Anglo-Saxons were Anglo-Saxon.

In 1751, Benjamin Franklin wrote that “the number of purely white people in the world is proportionally very small. ... And in Europe, the Spaniards, Italians, French, Russians, and Swedes are generally of what we call a swarthy complexion; as are the Germans also, the Saxons only excepted, who with the English, make the principle body of white people on the face of the earth. I could wish their numbers were increased.”

Yet, for most who came from Europe, there was a mitigating factor: They were “white”—and whiteness made all the difference. To safeguard the Anglo-Saxon vision, a pervasive culture of whiteness—with defined political, religious, and ethnic identities—was born. To be “white” eventually would be considered Anglo-Saxon enough. Whiteness became the passport into the exceptional space that was American identity.

During the First Great Awakening, when evangelical Protestantism spread across New England, revivalist Jonathan Edwards was convinced that the “glorious work of God” was destined to begin in America. Based on his interpretation of the prophecy of Isaiah, Edwards wrote, “It is signified that it shall begin in some very remote part of the world. ... I cannot think that anything else can be here intended but America.” Edwards further proclaimed that “in order to introduce a new and more excellent state of the church” where “the power of God might be more conspicuous,” God had to start all over in a new world, America.

Such confidence in the divine nature of America’s mission easily gave way to white evangelicals believing themselves to be God’s uniquely “chosen” people. The white evangelical community assumed that spreading their brand of Christianity was essential to the nation remaining true to its divine mission—to build an Anglo-Saxon nation. Thus, the white evangelical community was alarmed when great numbers of non-Anglo-Saxon Europeans began to flood into the country. They offered what they believed to be an efficacious solution: Convert them to Anglo-Saxon Christianity and hence to “whiteness.”

As evangelicals were spreading their brand of Christianity in the 18th and 19th centuries, they believed themselves to be also spreading Anglo-Saxonism. Their mission was as much an Anglo-Saxon mission as it was a Christian mission. Converting “foreigners” was for them a way to protect the Anglo-Saxon identity of America. “Conversion to [evangelical] Christianity was considered the only logical way to produce Anglo-Saxons out of the tired and huddled masses,” explained sociologist Daniel B. Lee. By linking Anglo-Saxonism with godliness, evangelical Christianity has been historically complicit in promoting a “great” America that is equated with white supremacy.

“In a word, our national character is that of the Anglo-Saxon race,” wrote 19th-century church historian Robert Baird. Baird argued that “essentially Germanic or Teutonic [are]

Far from abandoning their role as “values voters,” evangelicals simply made clear what they value above all else.

the chief supports of the ideas and institutions of evangelical Christianity.”

Christian Anglo-Saxon whiteness has subsequently served as the criterion, spoken or unspoken, for determining who is a “real” American, who is entitled to the rights of “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,” and who has the right to cross borders and occupy certain spaces. Essentially, whiteness provides the measure for what it means to be a legitimate citizen.

The “city on the hill” that the early Americans were building was to be nothing less than a sacred witness to Anglo-Saxon (white) supremacy.

When character no longer matters

Donald Trump’s vision to Make America Great Again is a 21st-century effort to carry forth the legacy of the Anglo-Saxon myth and the culture of whiteness that protects that myth. Recovery of America’s “greatness” was associated with the country ridding itself of nonwhite immigrants, whose very presence—according to Trump—has sent the nation spiraling into social disarray and moral decadence.

To bolster this prescription for America’s greatness, Trump trafficked in disparaging misrepresentations of Mexican immigrants as rapists and of African-American communities as dangerous enclaves of criminality. His vision for “greatness” therefore resonates with those who have longed for an Anglo-Saxon/white America. In this way Trump’s campaign served as a clarion call to “take back the country” from those detrimental to America’s exceptionalist identity, namely nonwhite people.

The value proposition of Trump’s Make America Great Again campaign is clear. It is the promise to make America *white* again—which is why so many people of color had a visceral reaction to this campaign mantra.

This brings us back to white evangelical support for Donald Trump. What does this unprecedented support say about their priority of values?

Given evangelical Protestantism’s historical relationship to white supremacy, it is no wonder that Trump’s campaign



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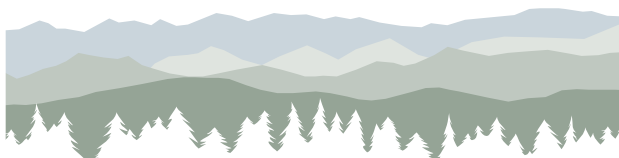
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appealed to a vast majority of white evangelical voters. Trump harkened back to this history by aligning America's greatness with evangelical Christian values, as he consistently linked a great America with a Christian America. He made it clear by suggesting that saying "Merry Christmas" was a sign of patriotism.

In this view, safeguarding the property of Anglo-Saxon white America takes priority over a commitment to individual morality. Ironically, that which was proclaimed as a mark of Anglo-Saxon exceptionalism—upright character—is dwarfed by a resolve to maintain a white supremacist nation.

The 'death rattle' of white Christian America?

Most of white Christian America ignored Trump's intemperate behavior to support his vision of American greatness. In this regard, a majority of white Christian

**If people cannot pass the test of
whiteness, then there are certain
spaces they cannot enter.**

America found common cause with Trump's Anglo-Saxon exceptionalist values, eschewing any pretense of valuing personal morality. Such support reveals the corrupting nature of Anglo-Saxon exceptionalism.

To be fair, white evangelicals were not alone in their significant support of Trump's campaign. Fifty-eight percent of nonevangelical white Protestants and 60 percent of white Catholics did the same. Researcher Robert P. Jones argues that the 2016 presidential election represented the "death rattle" of white Christian America's attempt to protect the country from the consequences of a nonwhite America.

No one made this case more sharply than Michele Bachmann, who said to a gathering of "values-voter" evangelicals, "It's a math problem of demographics and a changing United States. ... [T]his is the last election when we even have a chance to vote for somebody who will stand up for godly moral principles. This is it." The implication is clear: The more threatened the white demographic, the fiercer the defense of Anglo-Saxon white supremacy.

The bottom line is that in their support of Trump, much of white Christian America opted to support a white supremacist vision for the country. As for white evangelicals, far from abandoning their role as "values voters," they simply made clear what they value above all else.

Left to be determined is what those in the faith community who did *not* support the Make America Great Again campaign value most. Their real vote will be seen in their actions, because silence means consent. ■

Kelly Brown Douglas is dean of Episcopal Divinity School at Union Theological Seminary and author of Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God, from which portions of this article were adapted.

Popping Our Own Bubbles

RECENTLY, a Facebook troll accused me of liking country singer Carrie Underwood. The troll was ... me.

"I hate to admit it ... but in the interest of full disclosure, I kind of love Carrie Underwood's 'Cowboy Casanova,'" said 23-year-old me. Real-time me was horrified.

The indignities kept coming. College junior me: "I was impressed by Mike Huckabee and Ron Paul," after a GOP debate in South Carolina in 2008. (*Mike Huckabee?!)* College senior me, more inscrutably, presumably comparing President Obama's first inauguration to Woodstock: "Back from Obamastock, living the dream."

Of all the ways to be internet shamed, I hadn't counted on my old selves.

Launched in March 2015, Facebook's feature On This Day collects every status update and photo



like it: On This Day is a best friend eager to remind me how desperately, and how often, I've tried to be cool. But it also reflects me at my most earnest, filled with unselfconscious observations on life and tentative explorations into new ideas of justice, identity, and belonging.

"Facebook has built up a remarkable digital history on many of us ... [it] understands exactly who and what you care about," wrote Josh Constone in TechCrunch, indifferent to my country-pop-hating posturing that, until last week, I thought was a lifelong belief.

But the tech company's intuition about our desire for nostalgia has felt off-target this year. After a year of domestic and international chaos, we were not so eager for reminders of past trauma next to today's fresh ones. And in a season when battle lines are so clearly drawn—"You're either vocal or you're complicit"—a private record of our public reckonings can trigger an avalanche of shame and bullying turned inward. *Did I really use to talk up that policy proposal, now that I'm firmly on this side? Did I really celebrate that artist, about whom I can now rattle off a list of at least five ways they are super problematic? Who was I then?*

After the 2016 election, media voices made much to-do about the "bubbles" created by social media.

They meant this horizontally, as in increasingly polarized social groupings. But I wonder, too, about the bubbles that social media encourages us to create around our present selves. Here, today, we are always correct, always righteous, always cool. But if we are truly to show up at the table, we might need to work a bit harder to find the grace to bring with us our full history, as silly and contradictory and "so-naive-then" as we may be.

On Jan. 21, I scrolled through my roundup, and there I was at the Women's March in 2017, walking with my sister and friends and thousands of strangers, angry and proud and loud and *joyful* about it. Other posts tumbled after: my awe at the marches around the world, my resolute hope for the year ahead, my totally irrational, indomitable joy. After a mere 365 days, I barely recognized that woman, so convicted, so ready to scream for justice, so alive with the beautiful fury of the moment. *Who am I now?*

Thomas Merton once wrote that we gain nothing by sailing to the moon if we cannot cross the gulf that separates us from ourselves. Quite unintentionally, On This Day provides us with a needle to pop our own bubbles first. ■

Catherine Woodiwiss is deputy web editor at Sojourners.

"Facebook understands exactly who and what you care about."

users have shared on that day, every year, all the way back to the beginning of (Facebook) time.

For a social platform, this function is oddly, endearingly private. Newsfeed and Pages and Groups are where we meet others, but On This Day is where we meet ourselves. The for-your-eyes-only digital diary delivers a daily string of our admissions from years gone by, betting on our appetite for nostalgia and navel-gazing. Sometimes, reading the morning roundup delivers an ego boost. ("I was funny!" I once announced to an empty home.) Other times, I've shared things that my present self flat-out refuses to believe.

Facebook is 12 years old and has been with me longer than most close friendships in my life. And it acts



An Outline for a Service Acknowledging War Crimes

*"Has the United States ever apologized?
Or are we too big to apologize?"*

—Warrant Officer Hugh Thompson

The Chaplains Handbook has no confiteor or rite,
neither Book of Common Prayer nor missalette,
for scrutinies that beg forgiveness from the torn

and desecrated dead. We come contrite
for reports of helicopter gunships,
bodies observed in a ditch, the undress

of a girl who covered only her eyes:
Noncombatant gang rape, with bayonet.

"Kill anything that moves," bloodlust, U.S.
Our Agnus Dei mocked your mutilation.
Five hundred and four in My Lai, Son My.

Old age we robbed, our own years condemn.
We confess to you, brothers and sisters:
We beg. We pledge. Remember them.

*Rose Marie Berger is poetry editor for Sojourners.
This spring marks the 50th anniversary of the My Lai
massacre (March 16, 1968) by U.S. troops in Vietnam.*
U.S. Army photo by Ronald L. Haeberle



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No matter the impetus for apathy,
the result is a lot of votes
left on the table.

Faith and the Apathetic Voter

Why do Christians who yearn for a more just society decide not to vote? • by **KATHERINE WEBB-HEHN**

CAL MORRIS WAS 20 and studying religion at Samford University in Birmingham, Ala., when he offered a stranger a ride. As they crested the Red Mountain Expressway, dropping into downtown, Morris, who's white, and his passenger, a black man old enough to be his grandfather, talked about how bad public transportation in the city was, how hard it was to get to work without your own ride.

The next morning, in his religion classes, Morris announced he was raising money to buy his new acquaintance a car. "I was thinking: 'I go to Samford. ... It's one of the richest places ever,'" Morris recently remembered. "I figured I could get the guy an \$800 El Camino." Instead, his professors and peers offered calls for prayer. It was his friends at work, not his classmates, who knew what it was like to need a break, and so they pooled enough money for the car.

That was two decades ago. The "El Camino incident" set off a series of revelations for the kid raised middle class in north Alabama by evangelical parents who never really talked politics at home or at church. Morris began to see how racial and economic disparity were tied to public policy, and how his conservative Christian friends tended to ignore or fetishize vulnerable folks as nothing but needy.

He isolated himself from the evangelical community. He moved into his car in the woods with his dog. He abandoned the notion of leading a church and kept working in coffee shops, like the one where he'd met the old man, searching for ways to build the kind of community he idolized in Wendell Berry novels, searching for ways

to be of use without any white savior hang-ups. What Morris couldn't reconcile was his understanding of the gospel with the "pull yourself up by the bootstraps" mentality in his Christian community. "The marginal, the outsider, the poor. These were the people of Jesus' heart, right? I became so disillusioned by how people who believe the Bible—the way I believe the Bible—voted that it drove me crazy," Morris said.

When I first met Morris five years ago, he had three kids and about as many teeth. He and his wife were living on food stamps as they got their own coffee shop up and running. Today, he's got a new smile and a shop nationally acclaimed for its bakery. I don't know if it was fatherhood or if he was always this way, but the guy's basically a philosophical Cookie Monster, comically loud and capable of referencing passages from Noam Chomsky while flipping a giddy toddler over his shoulder. At 41, he's living into the ideal he dreamed of in the woods. I've watched him at work, defrosting the ice maker while counseling a patron who'd recently lost his father. I spent my first weary months of motherhood toting my boy to his shop as our outing-for-the-day. When I told Morris I was writing about Christians and

voting and asked if I might use him as an example, he told me he had a confession: “I haven’t voted in a while.”

“How long’s a while?” I asked.

He was quiet for a minute.

“Twenty years.”

The privilege of apathy

Turns out, Morris has a kind of ethically induced political paralysis.

Because no one candidate or platform neatly marries to his religious principles or community-approved ethical code, opting out of the political process altogether feels like the higher moral choice. Even though he believes a conservative reading of the Bible leads to progressive politics, he couldn’t bring himself to vote—for most of his adult life.

In part, the problem for Morris is choosing a candidate from a party associated, in his neck of the woods, with immorality. “Christians have marinated in this culture where Democrats are beyond the pale,” said Fred Shepherd, chair of the political science department at Samford University and author of *Christianity and Human Rights: Christians and the Struggle for Global Justice*. A lot of Christians are struggling to turn away from the Republican party, Shepherd explained, even as GOP candidates increasingly do not reflect conservative morals.

Regardless of party, many Christians are indoctrinated to believe that government is inherently sinful. Theodore Trost, a professor of religion at the University of Alabama, explained it to me this way: “There’s no righteousness there, so why bother?”

I wish it was this easy to explain who Morris is. Both of these explanations are right, and both are wrong. Even the El Camino incident and the summary of the domino effect it had on his life is a too-tidy narrative; the truth of how we vote is harder to make sense of.

When I first started to work on this story in early 2017, I wanted to talk to Alabama Christians about how faith informed their voting. It was a simple idea: A story about listening to and holding space for opposing opinions. But then the Republican and Christian nationalist Roy Moore decided to run for the U.S. Senate seat vacated when Jeff Sessions became the U.S. attorney general, and things changed. Moore was already a contentious figure for defying federal law

in favor of his own brand of “biblical justice,” and then he was accused of being a sexual predator and pedophile—and *still* most evangelicals stood by him as he pursued the seat.

For some, Moore became unmistakable proof that evangelicals had shed their last shred of morality to stand with the Republican party. Moore’s staunch supporters have been called religious zealots by the politest of Southern churchgoers. The editor of *Christianity Today* declared a generation would have to pass before the integrity of the Christian faith or its evangelical followers might be restored.

Alabama Christians were the story du jour as examinations of faith and voting in my

blasé to the downright nihilistic. “The entire world is falling apart,” a 23-year-old graphic design student told me during her shift at an outlet mall 20 minutes south of Birmingham. After she rattled off a litany of modern problems (corrupt politicians, unaffordable health care, global warming), she took a deep breath and asked, “What’s the point in voting?” I heard different versions of the same question again and again. “Why waste my time?” asked a black millennial who wasn’t willing to get his hopes up for a Democrat in deep-red Alabama, where state-sanctioned voter suppression has repeatedly been at the center of federal investigations. “Who am I to decide?”

“I became so disillusioned by how people who believe the Bible—the way I believe the Bible—voted.”

—CAL MORRIS



Katherine Webb-Hehn

home state appeared in news outlets around the world. For my job at *Scalawag*, I wrote about Christians who opposed Moore and how black organizers, mostly Christian women, were responsible for his ultimate defeat despite having serious concerns about his Democrat opponent, Doug Jones. Countless other outlets published nearly every possible take on Christian voters.

My previous conversations with witty, lipsticked conservatives and sandaled Jesus-loving socialists suddenly felt less revolutionary.

‘What’s the point in voting?’

One group not showing up in the headlines? Politically apathetic Christians. Even though 86 percent of Alabamians identify as Christian, and even though in high turnout races nearly half of eligible voters don’t participate, news articles weren’t talking about the folks who don’t show up at the polls. There’s no one demographic breakdown of these people, just as there’s not one way to describe their apathy.

What I encountered ranged from the righteous “this world is broken so let’s focus on the next” to a kind of middle-class

asked a white middle-class artist whose own family admittedly never felt the blows of regressive policy and whose affluent Christian social circle shared the same unaffected disinterest.

No matter the impetus for apathy, the result is a lot of votes left on the table. If we’re to believe those who say we’re at an ideological crossroads in this country, where the political schism is growing deeper—the generation split, the urban-to-rural split—then these are the folks sitting quietly in the dark divide. What we lose along with their votes, of course, is more-accurate representation, democracy of all, where our leaders reflect the multiplicity of our population and where our policies address inequities among those very people: in pay, housing, imprisonment, education, and so on.

It’s those same disparities Morris began to recognize when he was a 20-year-old student. Yet as the Alabama Senate race exit polls showed, and my own reporting uncovered, white Christians, who are over-represented in positions of political power in this country, are less apt to vote because of those convictions.

To my fellow white Christians, I ask: If our beliefs paralyze us from participating in the systems affecting *us all*, if they blind us to

the ways these systems have power to harm or help our neighbors, then what good are they?

Claiming power and responsibility

“We should do politics better, not opt out,” Katelyn Beaty told me recently. Beaty is a popular Christian writer whose work focuses on justice. “Obviously, Trump’s and Roy Moore’s promises to ‘save’ people who feel forgotten, such as white working-class communities, or to return our country to some golden age of Judeo-Christian righteousness, are hollow and, in some sense, idolatrous. No one person or party has the power to do this,” Beaty said Christians must recognize the responsibility of democracy, despite its imperfections.

Isn’t everything imperfect? Is there anything we participate in that isn’t inherently flawed?

For two decades, Morris couldn’t reconcile the ways capitalism ultimately won out against humanitarian efforts despite all the empty talk about helping people. He was turned off by the “incessant hypocrisy,” but he was also turned off by similar hypocrisy in the church.

A reckoning of his political inaction meant a deeper reckoning with his fellow Christians.

“I think this is where Trump and Roy Moore are good for the Christian conservative community, especially for the apathetic voter like me,” he said. “It’s like: ‘Holy s**t, our name’s getting run through the mud.’” After the recent elections in Alabama—Jones’ victory as well as the young progressive Randall Woodfin upsetting the moneyed incumbent in Birmingham’s mayoral race—Morris said he felt a “wake-up call” and was planning to take his civic duty more seriously.

But he still doesn’t have faith in government.

“I used to think progress came from the church. But it’s people,” Morris said. “It’s persistent citizens leading action that brings about change. It’s those people putting pressure on political leaders to make change. I get that now.” ■

Katherine Webb-Hehn is a Birmingham-based writer and photographer. Her work has appeared in The New York Times, The Nation, The Bitter Southerner, In These Times, Pank, Arts & Letters, and elsewhere. She is the Alabama politics reporter for Scalawag.



HOW TO Combat Political Apathy

by **CHRISTINA COLÓN** and **FAITH-MARIE ZAMBLÉ**

In a time of voter suppression, gerrymandering, and persistent political scandals, it’s easy to wonder if voting matters anymore. Many people don’t vote at all, citing everything from long lines to ethical squeamishness. But *not* voting is still a vote, with real consequences for our democracy. Here are a few ways to reframe the way we think about voting:

1. Make it more than a vote

Voting is just one aspect of civic participation. Extend the action by engaging in your community. Participate in events at recreation centers, run for school board, and attend public forums on local policy. Don’t make a ballot the only place you voice concerns—communicate with local officials and speak up at city council meetings. Think wisely about how you spend your money and your time, and make civic commitment an everyday mindset rather than an annual event.

2. Think globally

Thinking about one’s individual ballot, by itself, can make voting feel uncomfortably personal and easy to dismiss. Instead, consider how your vote impacts those outside the voting booth. Many people are unable to vote in some or all elections, including legal permanent residents, U.S. citizens living in U.S. territories, and, in many states, formerly incarcerated persons. Think critically about how proposed policies will impact these individuals. Be mindful of a candidate’s disposition toward the world. U.S. foreign policy is felt worldwide—vote with our global neighbors in mind.

3. Recognize that voting is an extension of your faith

While you won’t find a Bible verse commanding Christians to vote, we *are* called to care for marginalized communities that may be adversely affected by social policies. Sometimes we have strong affinity for a candidate, and other times we feel that one is the lesser of two evils. To vote is to recognize that community is messy and people who run for political office are rarely perfect. In the moment, voting doesn’t always seem worthwhile or meaningful, but it is an act of hope, an expression of trust in the power of collective agency to build a more just future. ■

Christina Colón and Faith-Marie Zambélé are editorial assistants for Sojourners.

Wrestling with the Angel of Death

Most churches don't support medically assisted death. In states where it's legal, how do clergy and chaplains respond?

by **CATHY LYNN GROSSMAN**

illustration by **JON KRAUSE**

JEANNE AUDREY POWERS, 85 years and counting, wanted to stop counting. She felt herself growing more frail, less clear-headed. She was losing her sight. Worst of all, the woman who once spoke on international podiums was losing her words.

However, Jeanne Audrey, as her many friends called her, was technically not terminally ill, despite the waves of mini-strokes stealing her senses. California physicians, gatekeepers under the state's End of Life Options Act, would not deem her likely to die within six months, an essential qualification for a legal lethal prescription that would let her choose her final hour.

But she was dying to her self as she knew her self to be. And that was a form of suffering she did not believe God required of her, of anyone.

So Rev. Jeanne Audrey Powers—one of the United Methodist Church's leading voices for ecumenism, a champion for LGBTQ rights within her denomination, and someone who knew the doctrines of her church included one against suicide—bought herself a one-way ticket to Switzerland last September. There she died, at peace with her decision, in a euthanasia facility.

**"You can't fix
existential
distress for
someone.
But you can
accompany
them."**





“Wisdom and knowledge come through suffering. That is the redemptive aspect of it.”

She left two requests. One was that her last letter be included in the memorial service program, says Rev. Barbara Troxell, who officiated at the service. The letter describes a “deeply peaceful and affirming” vision Powers had of a fatherly God who came to her in prayer and tenderly called her “friend ... preparing me to trust the journey ahead.”

The second request was that her tombstone read: “Subversive to the end.”

Bedside manner

Among major U.S. denominations, only the Unitarian Universalists endorse the use of “medical aid in dying”—the terminology used by Compassion and Choices, a national lobby group for physician-assisted dying. Every other denomination is either silent on the topic or opposes it as suicide.

Yet seven U.S. jurisdictions currently allow aid in dying, either by law or by court decision: Washington, Vermont, Montana, California, Colorado, and the District of Columbia. In these places, clergy and chaplains who minister at the bedsides of the sick and dying may find themselves on the moral front lines, caught between the teaching common to most religions—only God sets the moment of someone’s death—and the growing belief held by many Americans that personal autonomy extends to the deathbed. And as some religious leaders admit, it’s a dilemma that pushes them to be clear on how they see the nature of God as well as the value, if any, they see in suffering.

For conservative Evangelical Free Church pastor Bob Burris, how long and how deeply we endure pain and suffering is entirely in the hands of the sovereign God—and he believes it should stay that way. When he sits by the side of fearful families who seek spiritual consolation, he tells them to “be joyful that we are not the creators of our own reality.”

Since California’s End of Life Options law took effect in June 2016, Burris, pastor for 20 years at Taft Avenue Community Church in Orange, says he has not encountered a direct request to provide spiritual comfort for someone who was planning to end their own life through medical intervention.

But he knows what he would say. Trust God, he would tell Christians. And for those without faith, he says, his compassionate role is to open the door to conversion, for the dying and for their surviving loved ones. In his experience, “The real reason that the lost are wanting to die is because they have no hope, they don’t have true relief from suffering.”

That kind of relief, the pastor says, is “only found at the cross. Dying well is dying with your trust in God. Our hope is in the savior who suffered far more than us.” If Burris himself were given a fatal diagnosis, he would live to his natural end, “joyfully,” believing he was accepting God’s will.

A dying perspective

Most Americans, however, don’t see dying this way. According to Gallup’s annual national Values and Beliefs poll conducted last May, “73 percent of U.S. adults say a doctor should be allowed to end a terminally ill patient’s life by painless means if the patient requests it,” and 57 percent find such an action “morally acceptable.”

LifeWay Research, an evangelical polling group, found that an even higher number, 67 percent, agreed that medical aid in dying was “morally acceptable” when “a person is facing a painful terminal disease.” This includes majorities of people in most faith groups including evangelicals, mainline Protestants, Catholics, and people with no religious identity.

Last November, 59 faith leaders, sidestepping the official positions of their denominations, wrote to Congress asking it not to rescind Washington, D.C.’s Death with Dignity Act. Their letter cites Luke 6:36: “Be merciful just as your father in heaven is merciful.”

Many clergy, however, see a divide between mercy and medical aid in dying.

Rev. Ray Allender, SJ, pastor of St. Agnes Church in San Francisco and a veteran of hospital ministry, remembers the day he got a call from a hospice chaplain seeking help. A Catholic patient in hospice care had said “she wanted to choose assisted suicide—and wanted to receive absolution. I told the chaplain I would be happy to speak with her if she

wanted me to, that I respect her conscience. I respect her decision. But I am not able to give her absolution,” Allender recalls. But “If she had asked for the sacrament for the sick, I would have been right over.”

He would have anointed her, prayed with her, and consoled her with “the healing presence of God in her suffering” to help her find spiritual peace. “I would have said that while I may not be able to reach out to her with absolution as Catholic priest, it was more important for her to reach out to God. But she never did contact me. I don’t know what happened with her,” says Allender.

All who suffer

Rev. Michael E. Moynahan, SJ, pastor at St. Ignatius Parish in Sacramento, Calif., has yet to face such a morally distressing moment, when someone wants to do “something they know is wrong, an act for which there is no replay button.”

What will guide him, he said, is the church’s teaching that “wisdom and knowledge come through suffering. That is the redemptive aspect of it. We are called to make the life-giving choices.” In Moynahan’s diocese, “We actively tried to discourage legislators from approving the [medical aid in dying] law.”

Catholic and evangelical lobbyists have brought that same message to one statehouse after another, usually prompting lawmakers to defeat medical aid in dying bills



Jeanne Audrey Powers requested that her tombstone read “Subversive to the end.”

Family photo

Rick Reinhard
before they ever leave committee. Disability rights activists joined in. They see such laws as demeaning the quality of their lives and subjecting them and their families to financial, social, and emotional pressures to cut off costly care. Such coalitions have blocked passage of similar laws in New York and Maryland. Then-Gov. Chris Christie, a Catholic, threatened to veto such a bill in New Jersey.

Still, Compassion and Choices' national constituency director, Brandi Alexander, says that individual clergy of most major faiths, the men and women who meet believers at the bedside, are "much more empathetic" to changing the laws.

So was the governor of California, former Jesuit seminarian Jerry Brown. When he signed the state's End of Life Options Act, he said, "I do not know what I would do if I were dying in prolonged and excruciating pain. I am certain, however, that it would be a comfort to be able to consider the options afforded by this bill. And I wouldn't deny that right to others."

"Comfort" is a term that goes beyond a sense of physical pain being eased. It touches on the very subjective idea of "suffering."

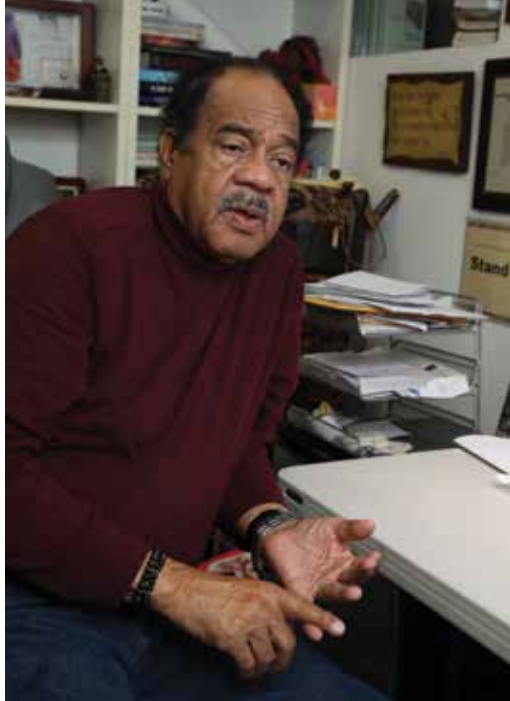
Suffering can be rooted in fear, despair, anger for the life past or present, or the unknown to come. It can be born of relationships with other people or with God. It afflicts both the dying and those living at their side, says San Francisco Rabbi Michael Goldberg in *Raising Spirits: Stories of Suffering and Comfort at Death's Door*, his book about his years as a hospice chaplain. Goldberg opposed assisted dying which, he wrote, leaves suffering unresolved for the dead and for the survivors.

Others see suffering differently. They view it as psychological, cultural—and optional. One can choose not to suffer.

What pills can't fix

Diane Kwasman of Riverside, Calif., and her mother, Roslyn Mellman, age 90, saw no redemptive value in Mellman suffering, in deep pain from a cascade of medical issues. Mellman was firm and clear: She wanted the option to die her own way.

Kwasman struggled to face the imminent death of her mother, no matter how that death came about. So even as she stepped forward to help Mellman connect with physicians willing to participate under the End of Life Options Act, Kwasman also sought support from her friend, Rabbi Suzanne Singer. They spoke both before and after Mellman



Paul Smith believes that people who choose the day they die may find peace and God's embrace.

swallowed the lethal pills and died in November.

Singer was "very caring and very interested. She's like the mother rabbi. If anything is wrong, she's on it," says Kwasman, who now says she feels "spiritually at peace" with her mother's decision. Singer had lobbied publicly for the law, in part, the rabbi says, because she was aware that already, in the shadows, "people have helped their loved ones 'under

the table.'" Singer acknowledges that palliative care is deeply valuable, "but I am not sure there is enough medication, enough palliative care, for some kinds of pain and suffering. People fear losing their dignity and their autonomy."

In some ways, Singer is right: In Pew Research Center's 2013 study on end of life choices, people were asked about the "measures of a good life." Living without severe pain did not head the list. It was number four, behind the ability to communicate, to enjoy life, and to feed oneself.

But Dr. Christina Puchalski disagrees with the idea that palliative care is not sufficient to address suffering beyond physical pain. As a physician and founding director of the George Washington Institute for Spirituality and Health in Washington, D.C., she takes a more expansive view of palliative care—one that insists existential or spiritual distress is worthy of treatment. The institute educates clergy, chaplains, and health professionals on how to address such terrors.

Her "prescription" for this isn't a cup of crushed pills and a glass of water. "You can't fix existential distress for someone," Puchalski says. "But you can accompany them. You can be a compassionate presence who listens in a non-judgmental way. When this happens, I have witnessed people come to a place of immense peace."

'Go down, Death'

Rev. Paul Smith, 82, has his own spin on Puchalski's advice for counseling those nearing death, medically assisted or otherwise: Yes, accompany people. Yes, listen compassionately. Yes, let peace come to the restless dying. But recognize, says Smith, that people who choose the day they die may find peace, and God's embrace, on that road as well.

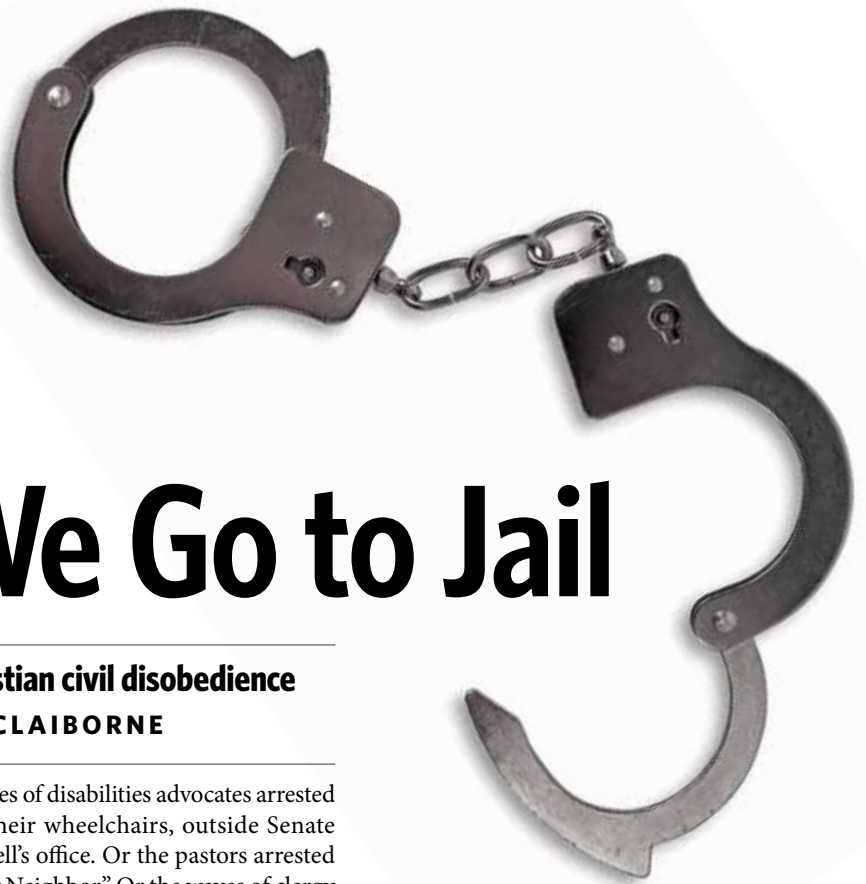
Smith—a retired Presbyterian Church USA pastor, civil rights activist, and author of books and studies about views of dying in the African-American community—takes a public stand at odds with many black Americans who oppose medical aid in dying.

It's all about trust, Smith says. Many distrust the

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"People fear losing their dignity and their autonomy."





Why We Go to Jail

A brief history of Christian civil disobedience

by SHANE CLAIBORNE

YOU MAY REMEMBER the images of disabilities advocates arrested last year, some handcuffed in their wheelchairs, outside Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell's office. Or the pastors arrested holding signs that said: "Love Thy Neighbor." Or the waves of clergy and faith-leader arrests in Ferguson and Standing Rock, and those advocating for Dreamers and opposing tax cuts for the rich.

Maybe you heard about pastor Jarrod McKenna and Delroy Bergsma in Perth, Australia, who suspended themselves four stories above the office of Foreign Minister Julie Bishop to persuade the Australian government to act for refugees held on Manus Island without supplies. Or last year's witness on the steps of the Supreme Court where 18 people of faith were arrested protesting the death penalty. Or the August gathering in Charlottesville, Va., where hundreds of courageous pastors, clergy, and other activists confronted the hatred of torch-bearing neo-Nazis and white supremacists.

These events aren't about going to jail. They are about countering hatred with nonviolent love.

Civil disobedience is holy work. Gandhi called nonviolent civil disobedience "our sacred duty." There are many ways to nonviolently resist injustice: Boycotts. Divestment. Writing op-eds. Petitions. Lobbying. Prayer vigils. Groundswell campaigns. Picket lines. Strikes. Die-ins. Sit-ins. Lock-downs. Distributing flyers on street corners. (Famously, the late political scientist Gene Sharp listed 198 methods of nonviolent direct action.)

Going to jail isn't the only way to resist evil. But it is *one* way. And a very effective way, with a rich tradition for Christians. Though questions of privilege arise when it comes to risking arrest, what also surfaces is that some people have nothing to lose "but their chains," as the chant goes. Many marginalized people have found civil disobedience to be a way to rage collectively against injustice and to stop business as usual.

Martin Luther King Jr. saw nonviolent civil disobedience as a creative, constructive outlet for rage. I think of workers who have blocked trains and ports, activists who have shut down federal buildings and police stations and who have dropped banners from buildings and bridges. These are beautiful expressions of holy rage.

By not
mirroring evil
we are able
to make a
spectacle
of it.

Civil rights advocate
Rosa Parks after her
arrest in Montgom-
ery, Ala., in 1955.

U.S. Capitol Police make an arrest as disability rights activists interrupt a Senate committee meeting on a proposal to eliminate the Affordable Care Act.



Chip Somodevilla/Getty Images

Nonviolent civil disobedience is often what tips the balance in social movements. Not everyone will do it, but those who *do* raise the urgency of the issue. The courage we see in Rosa Parks, Bree Newsome, and Colin Kaepernick is contagious. Their actions get other people to move.

A long and rich tradition

First-century Christians were branded as lawbreakers for refusing to bow to the Roman emperor. Martin Luther broke ecclesiastical laws of the Catholic Church. American abolitionists broke laws to bring about racial equality. During the tyranny of Nazi Germany, Corrie ten Boom's family protected Jews, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Martin Niemöller resisted Hitler's regime. Anabaptists, Quakers, Mennonites, and Brethren communities refused to engage in war. Christians smuggled Bibles into the Soviet Union and other Soviet Bloc nations, and some are still doing that today in places such as North Korea, China, and Iran.

I prefer to think of nonviolent civil disobedience as "divine obedience." We are obeying God even when human laws stand in the way. Whatever we call it—civil disobedience, moral resistance, direct action, holy troublemaking—disobeying bad laws not only holds a historic place in social change but it has also been an ever-present part of the Christian story.

In the Old Testament, we have the Exodus story of the Hebrew slaves escaping Pharaoh's plantation—an iconic act of liberation and holy rebellion. Moses' very birth was an act of civil disobedience. The Hebrew midwives rescued him in defiance of royal orders, and his mother floated him down a river to escape Pharaoh's slaughter of the innocents.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were thrown into the fiery furnace for refusing a royal order that violated their commitment to God. Daniel ignored a law prohibiting prayer and King Darius flung him into the den of lions.

Then there's Jesus, whose life was marked with a subversive twist from birth. The magi protected the baby Jesus, defying Herod's orders. Jesus challenged Caesar's power and was accused of insurrection. He was executed on a Roman cross—reserved for the worst agitators in the empire—next to two other rebels.

Just as Jesus went to jail, so did many of his followers, beginning with John the Baptist. The book of Acts and other accounts of the early church are filled with stories of jail time, beatings, and state-sanctioned executions—such as the one about the Spirit breaking Paul and Silas out of jail. Paul's letter to Philemon urges a former slave owner to welcome back a fugitive slave (Onesimus) and to treat him not as a slave but as a brother.

The martyrs were known for their faithfulness to God over

Caesar. When Christians proclaimed, "Jesus is Lord," they were saying, "Caesar is not." The early Christians were rebels and revolutionaries, but their revolution was as much for the freedom of the oppressors as the oppressed. It was a nonviolent revolution marked by enemy-love, gentleness, and audacious grace, but a revolution nonetheless. A mob in Thessalonica said of Christians: "These people who have been turning the world upside down have come here also ... They are all acting contrary to the decrees of the emperor, saying that there is another king named Jesus" (Acts 17:6–7).

Quotes from the early centuries of Christianity illustrate the subversive nature of the Jesus movement. Tertullian wrote: "We are charged with being irreligious people and, what is more, irreligious in respect to the emperors since we refuse to pay religious homage to their imperial majesties."

Origen said: "Christians form ... an obscure and mysterious community founded on revolt and the advantage that accrues from it." The Roman popular media of the third century said of Christians: "They form a rabble of profane conspiracy ... They despise titles of honor and the purple robe of high government office though hardly able themselves to cover their own nakedness." Augustine, one of the most prominent ethicists in Christendom,

said, "An unjust law is no law at all." As we look at church history, it is hard to miss the collision between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of this world.

Jesus promises his disciples that the world will hate them—that if they live real good, they will get beat up real bad. But they are to return love for evil. They are to stare into the face of those who persecute them and say, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).

The holy trinity of law and order

Three Bible passages—the holy trinity of law and order—are often used to squash civil disobedience: 1 Peter 2:12–15, Titus 3:1–2, Romans 13:1–2. These passages urge submission to government.

But it takes some serious theological gymnastics to use these few verses to insist that Christians in every time and place should obey their leaders at all times. Was Hitler

The Gospel and the Law

If frequency is any indication, early Christians were quite familiar with the criminal justice system of their day. The following words appear often in the New Testament:

Arrest: 37 times

Prison or prisoner: 63 times

Crucify or crucifixion: 56 times

Court: 9 times

Rebel, rebellious, or rebellion:
9 times

Criminal: 6 times

Guard: 33 times



Adam Betticher/Getty Images

Police arrest a Black Lives Matter protester for disrupting holiday shopping at the Mall of America in Bloomington, Minn., in 2014.

established by God? What about Saddam Hussein?

It's important to get the power dynamic right. God is our king, above all other authorities. God allows, rather than consecrates, those in power.

God didn't want Israel to have a king, but the people demanded a king so they could be "like other nations" (1 Samuel 8:5). God warned them that a king would enslave them, force them to fight in wars, take their best crops in taxes, and more. God later said, "I gave you a king in my anger" (Hosea 13:11).

The same Paul who called for respect for authority in Romans 13 wrote in Romans 12 about not being "conformed to this world" and went to jail himself for subverting authority. In Ephesians, Paul says that we do not wrestle against flesh and blood (people) but against the powers and authorities (using the same word he used in Romans).

When we "submit" to authority, we remember that the authorities of this world are in turn to submit and be accountable to God. I suggest two ways to submit to worldly authority: First, obey the good laws. Second, disobey the bad laws and be willing to suffer the consequences.

When my friends and I went to jail in Philadelphia for feeding the homeless and sleeping in the public parks, we raised questions about the anti-homeless laws the city was passing. We were ultimately found not guilty. The police officers who arrested us showed up to argue on our behalf. The judge even said, "If it weren't for people who broke the bad laws, we wouldn't have the freedom we have. We'd still have slavery. That's the story of this country from the Boston Tea Party to the civil rights movement. These folks are not criminals; they are freedom fighters."

As Gandhi said, "Noncooperation with evil is as much a duty as cooperation with good." Resistance work exposes injustice and makes it so uncomfortable that people can't help but respond.

The power of nonviolence

Humility and nonviolence are central components to faithful civil disobedience. Through suffering rather than armed conflict, we unmask evil and expose injustice. Nonviolence exposes the violence precisely by contrast: by not mirroring the evil we are able to make a spectacle of it.

In Martin Luther King Jr.'s 1965 "The American Dream" speech, he told his opponents:

Do to us what you will and we will still love you ... Throw us in jail ... Threaten our children and bomb our homes, and as difficult as it is, we will still love you. But be assured that we will ride you down by our capacity to suffer. One day we

I prefer to think of nonviolent civil disobedience as "divine obedience."

will win our freedom ... we will so appeal to your heart and your conscience that we will win you in the process. And our victory will be a double victory.

Good resistance work holds up a mirror to the world and changes laws. When you see militarized police spraying nonviolent protesters in Birmingham or Standing Rock, it makes you ask questions about who is on the right side of history.

In 2003, I went to Iraq with a team of pastors and doctors. We took medications to hospitals, hung out with families, and worshiped with Iraqi Christians. This was all technically illegal because of U.S. sanctions during the war. When we returned, the U.S. State Department filed a lawsuit against our group, specifically the doctors, who faced up to 12 years in prison. We argued that the sanctions and bombing violated God's law to love our neighbors (and enemies, for that matter) as ourselves.

And we were willing to go to jail for that.

In the end, no one went to jail. However, some of the doctors were fined around \$20,000.

In an act of revolutionary subordination, they paid the fine in Iraqi dinar.

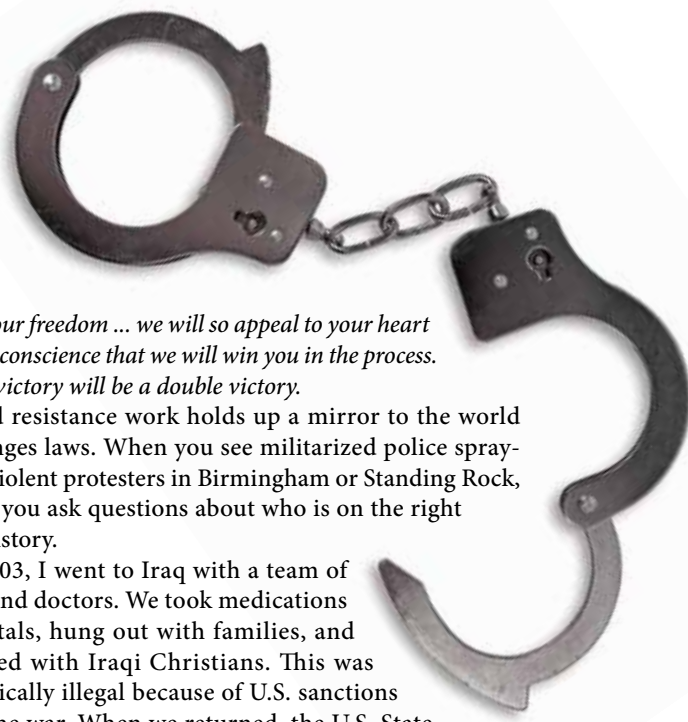
More recently, 18 of us held a banner in front of the Supreme Court that said: "Stop Executions!" We were not blocking doors or disruptive in any way, but because the simple act of protest is illegal on Supreme Court property, we faced up to 60 days in prison and fines, all together, of \$90,000. At the moment we were arrested, the government was preparing to execute a man in Virginia named Ricky Gray. It is a strange thing to live in a country where it is legal to execute people but illegal to hold a banner in front of our highest court.

Our times demand courageous action. King used the following metaphor: Traffic laws are good things, but when a fire is raging, the rescue team runs the red light. When a person is bleeding, the ambulance speeds through red lights, and other cars get out of the way.

So yes, we go to jail—for getting in the way of wars, the death penalty, and police violence, for supporting vulnerable people and speaking out against hatred and violence.

When my kids ask me why I've been in jail, I always tell them: "You can go to jail for doing something wrong. And you can also go to jail for doing something right. We went to jail for doing something right." ■

Shane Claiborne is a founder of The Simple Way in Philadelphia and co-director of Red Letter Christians. His newest book is Executing Grace: How the Death Penalty Killed Jesus and Why It's Killing Us. Portions of this material appeared in The Irresistible Revolution, Updated and Expanded (Zondervan).





By Victoria Newton Ford

Black Girl Power

Exploring love and rage in *A Wrinkle in Time*.

OPRAH WINFREY BEGAN HER acceptance speech for the Cecil B. DeMille Award at the 2018 Golden Globes by traveling through time. “In 1964, I was a little girl sitting on the linoleum floor of my mother’s house in Milwaukee. ... It is not lost on me that at this moment, there are some little girls watching as I become the first black woman to be given this same award.” Hours later, her speech dedicated to those enheartened children—particularly little black girls—was eclipsed by pleas for the entrepreneur to run for president.

Since the 2016 presidential election and, more recently, the Alabama Senate election, demand has been high for black women to save America from itself. The proposition’s allure appears only to increase when black women rebuff these requests to perform political labor as trouble intensifies. Jordan McDonald writes in *Bitch* magazine about this reprehensible exaltation—“Black women will save us”—and how it renders black women, from Oprah to Michelle Obama, indispensable saviors. “Stripped of our humanity and agency, the refrain does not ask that Black women save, but expects it of us, as if we each were God herself. It is a disturbing testament to the world’s continued failure to love us properly.” While this latest historical failure sought to conscript another black woman into a toolbox for the country’s deliverance, Oprah’s final message—“I want all the girls watching here, now, to know that a new day is on the horizon”—was impossible to rob.

Above, Storm Reid plays Meg Murry in *A Wrinkle in Time*, directed by Ava DuVernay, right.

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Their allies include the billion-year-old ethereal beings Mrs. Whatsit, Mrs. Who, and Mrs. Which. Together they teach Meg how to survive and defeat a foul, mind-controlling brain known as “IT” and a wild darkness consuming stars and planets throughout the universe called “the Black Thing.”

In this rendition of L’Engle’s story, however, the sage Murry children are black—offering us a hero of the universe who, in our current political space and time, is afforded the least agency: Meg is an angry black girl.

It can be said that DuVernay is the first black woman with the tools capable of creating a universe sizable enough to contain the multitudes of a furious black heroine. The weight of this is not lost on her. DuVernay has openly talked about her apprehension around the film’s reception. Speaking at the *New Yorker* Festival last October, she said, “I feel something very deep in my gut when Oprah’s voice says, ‘There’s a darkness in the world, and the only one who can stop it is ...’ smash cut to a black girl.”

But should a black female director be concerned if her vision of a black girl who saves the universe works only in service of the thousands of little black girls sitting in

their mother’s homes, expectant and watching? I don’t believe she should.

In her review of the novel for its 50th anniversary, Pamela Paul of *The New York Times* wrote, “The book has especially won over young girls. And it usually reaches them at a particularly pivotal moment of pre-adolescence when they are actively seeking to define themselves, their ambitions and place in the world.”

I did not read *Wrinkle* as a child; the novel “missed my neighborhood.” L’Engle’s Meg is—quite explicitly—not written as black. Her nature, though, reminds me of my black girlhood—years brimming with exhaustion, pain, and difference, as well as tenderness, wonder, and loud love. It is love that roots the novel and grounds for our

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As providence would have it, a film releasing this March has the potential to summon that new day, with none other than Oprah portraying the leader of a trio of immortal guides showing black girls universally what proper love looks like: the latest adaptation of Madeleine L’Engle’s 1963 Newbery Medal-winning classic novel, *A Wrinkle in Time*.

AVA DUVERNAY, director of the Academy Award-nominated *Selma*, is the first black woman to solo-direct a film like *Wrinkle*, with a budget of more than \$100 million. Undeniably, it is no easy feat to tell this story. The film’s protagonist, Meg Murry, played by actress Storm Reid, is a young teenage girl “tessering,” or wrinkling, through time—traveling across planets with her friend Calvin O’Keefe and her 5-year-old virtuoso brother, Charles Wallace, in search of their missing scientist father.

New & Noteworthy



The Image Works

Yes, She Can

Dolores Huerta changed the course of history when she formed what became the United Farm Workers union with César Chávez. Often overshadowed by her co-founder, Huerta’s defiant resistance, struggle, and sacrifice take center stage in Peter Bratt’s captivating documentary, *Dolores*. Premieres March 27 on PBS. doloresthemovie.com

An Emerging Voice

Folk singer Azniv Korkejian was born in Aleppo, Syria, to an Armenian family. Relocated to Saudi Arabia and then to the U.S., Korkejian’s moniker, “Bedouine,” is drawn from the name of a nomadic group. With gentle guitar and smooth vocals, her self-titled debut album affirms her identity as a wanderer. Spacebomb

An Advocate’s Legacy

Phyllis Tickle was a writer, teacher, lay theologian, advocate, and leading voice in the Emergent Christianity movement before her death in 2015. In *Phyllis Tickle: A Life*, Jon M. Sweeney provides insight into her rich legacy. Church Publishing

What Comes After

Clemantine Wamariya fled the Rwandan massacre at the age of 6. In *The Girl Who Smiled Beads: A Story of War and What Comes After*, Wamariya (with co-author Elizabeth Weil) grapples with past trauma and challenges what it means to be a refugee. Crown

The Class Undertow

THE TONYA HARDING saga was a Great American Novel of the 1990s waiting to be written—equal parts Theodore Dreiser and Three Stooges. Harding was the impoverished striver who muscled her way to the top of the hoity-toity world of women's figure skating, only to be disgraced when her ex-husband's buffoonish associates carried out a bizarre assault on a rival skater, Nancy Kerrigan.

The film *I, Tonya* delivers this story well, both as tragedy and as farce. It shows us the particular violence of frustrated hopes, malnourished emotions, and internalized self-hatred that passes from generation to generation like a plague in the lives of poor white people in America.

In 1972, when Tonya Harding was 2 years old, sociologist Richard Sennett and Jonathan Cobb published a book called *The Hidden Injuries of Class*. That phrase kept running through my mind as I watched *I, Tonya*. Sennett and



Sebastian Stan and Margot Robbie in *I, Tonya*.

abuse. Her mother torments her into giving her best on the ice, but comes up empty on empathy or affection. And the abuse gets physical. As a teenager (played by Margot Robbie), Tonya moves out to live with her boyfriend and ex-husband-to-be, Jeff Gillooly, and he hits her too.

Violence was not alien to young Tonya, who grew up shooting rabbits with her father. When Gillooly hits her, she hits back. When her mother throws a steak knife at her that sticks in her arm, she pulls the bloody knife out and holds it for a long moment, locking her mother in a steely gaze, before finally laying it on the table. The mother doesn't even acknowledge the incident, much less apologize.

Screenwriter Steven Rogers and director Craig Gillespie walk a fine line in *I, Tonya*, demonstrating the harsh cruelty of some characters and the outlandish absurdity of others without seeming to belittle them. They mostly succeed, even with Harding's self-appointed bodyguard, Shawn Eckhardt, and his stooges who pull off the Kerrigan hit. Janney certainly shows us that even Golden had her reasons when she stands in the middle of the diner where she works, coffee pot in hand, glued to the wall-mounted TV, just waiting to see her

daughter's face light up at the end of her routine.

I, Tonya also reminds us that this story was part of the dawning of round-the-clock tabloid media. In the film, a reporter for the '90s gossip-and-gore syndicated TV show *Hard Copy* explains that cable news and a new thing called the internet had created an insatiable demand for sensationalism. Shows like his did the stuff the mainstream media looked down on, he says, "then became."

In an especially telling visual commentary near the end of the movie, as the last TV station van pulls away from Gillooly's front yard, on the TV screen in his living room we see the image of an accused murderer named O.J. Simpson.

The American tragedy here is that LaVona Golden and Tonya Harding, like most Americans, believed that if you work hard enough, you can rise above your origins and achieve your dreams. Nobody worked harder than Tonya Harding, but in the end there was no room for her at the top. In the movie, a skating judge essentially tells her that the system is rigged against people like her.

And so it still is. ■

Danny Duncan Collum teaches writing at Kentucky State University in Frankfort. He is the author of the novel *White Boy*.



Nobody worked harder than Tonya Harding, but there was no room for her at the top.

Cobb profiled white working-class Americans who felt the pain of being disrespected and looked down upon, yet couldn't help blaming themselves for that fact. One of their interviewees remarked, "I really didn't have it upstairs to do satisfying work."

Less than two years after Sennett's book arrived, LaVona Golden, a foul-mouthed, chain-smoking wraith of a waitress (played by Allison Janney), intimidated a WASPy skating teacher into taking her daughter Tonya as a student. From that point on, in the movie, the girl's life is blur of skating and

Continued from Page 41

hero themes of faith, courage, and hope.

When the “Mrs. W’s” take Meg, Charles Wallace, and Calvin to planet Uriel, they reveal to the children the evil darkness and its arresting agony they’re called to fight. But Mrs. Who, quoting scripture, reminds Meg of fighters before her—the best among them being Jesus—reminding her that “the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.” As scripture taught me at a young age, an aspect of Christ’s light and love was informed by righteous indignation. Reading the novel now as an adult queer black woman of faith, I’m affirmed that the interiority of black women’s lives is worthy of a grand exhibition, especially the breadth of our love.

By presenting Meg as an angry black girl, the film version of *Wrinkle* places its central themes of moral responsibility and the power of love into a historical narrative

Little black girls deserve a hero all their own.

wherein black women have been required to be saviors for a world that abandons and rebukes them. The warrior brand of love Meg uses to save the universe comes from anger at being made an outcast.

This latest incarnation of Meg Murry exists in the same universe as real-world black heroines such as Katherine Johnson, whose work as a mathematician and “computer” for NASA inspired the film *Hidden Figures*, and Claudette Colvin, who was arrested at age 15 for refusing to give up her bus seat in Montgomery, Ala., nine months before Rosa Parks did the same. DuVernay’s Meg exists in the same plane as every documented black heroine, but also expressly those who were so unbought and unbossed that their lionhearted acts were erased.

“BE A WARRIOR.” This is Mrs. Which’s call to action for Meg. On screen, this message is communicated by a black woman to a young black girl, giving her full permission to fight like the soldier she is destined to be. Poet and feminist Audre Lorde, who self-described as a “black, lesbian, mother, warrior, poet,” wrote often and directly about black womanhood and anger. In her



From *All the Money in the World*

THE WHOLE TRUTH

THE BIG STORY about Ridley Scott’s film *All the Money in the World* has been the replacement of Kevin Spacey with Christopher Plummer after the movie had been completed. A generous helping of digital dexterity made space for a brilliant performance by Plummer as the billionaire J. Paul Getty. That Plummer gave this role his all with only a few days’ notice, and that Scott is such a quick, decisive filmmaker that he could remake an entire character only a month or so from the film’s release, makes this a bit of cinema history.

But lost in the mix is an ethical question about the film’s existence in the first place. (Spoilers below.) It’s bleak, about a young man abducted and tortured while his inordinately wealthy grandfather refused to pay ransom. The movie’s core is the suffering endured by the kidnapped grandson Paul (Charlie Plummer—no relation), and the lengths to which his mother, Gail (Michelle Williams), went to rescue him; there’s a “friendly” kidnapper thrown in for good measure. The bleak is made bearable because the film moves at a fair pace, becoming one of the more gripping mainstream thrillers in a while. It’s one of the most entertaining films Ridley Scott has made.

Here’s the problem: This is not only a bleak story, played for audience

pleasures of rollercoaster stress and catharsis, but a true story about a terrible event with an ultimately tragic ending. But the movie doesn’t tell you that. It presents a contained narrative in which a powerful man, who may have been so egocentric he believed himself to be the reincarnation of a Roman emperor, was so blinded by selfishness that he refused to help his own grandson in desperate times. But courage, smarts, and a bit of cash got the grandson rescued anyway. The old man dies, and in a closing caption we learn his heirs have donated vast amounts of their inheritance to humanitarian causes. This is not uninteresting, and the moral chasm of such greed is worthy of attention, of course.

What the movie doesn’t tell us, however, is that the victim did not then recover from the trauma of his ordeal. All the money in the world couldn’t save Paul Getty from a spiral into drug addiction, an overdose that led to him becoming quadriplegic, and an early death. The tragic aspects of the life beyond the story told in the film, no matter how complex, are not honored by denying them in favor of entertainment. ■

Gareth Higgins is an Irish writer and founder of moviesandmeaning.com and www.irelandretreats.com.



Oprah Winfrey in
A Wrinkle in Time.

essay “Eye to Eye: Black Women, Hatred, and Anger,” Lorde writes, “Every black woman in America lives her life somewhere along a wide curve of ancient and unexpressed angers.”

“Stay angry, little Meg,” Mrs. Whatsit whispers in the novel. “You will need all your anger now.”

Meg Murry is a reservoir of anger. Not only does she believe that she’s odd, ugly, and unintelligent, she also thinks she must pretend to be like everyone else—as her 10-year-old twin brothers do—to survive. However, the heretical gifts Meg receives from the three Mrs. W’s to save the universe are just those things from which she has been running: her faults—“anger, impatience, stubbornness.”

Meg’s anger—bred from her father’s disappearance and, later, her realization that her father is imperfect—is an extension of her love. Her anger is antidote for saving the world, for the rescue of her father and her brother and, most important, herself. Meg’s anger is information and energy. Throughout the novel, Meg realizes this: “Of course! It really helped ever so much

because it made me mad, and when I’m mad I don’t have room to be scared.”

As Audre Lorde instructs, “When I live through pain without recognizing it, self-consciously, I rob myself of the power that can come from *using* that pain, the power to fuel some movement beyond it. ... And that is suffering, a seemingly inescapable cycle.”

Little black girls deserve a hero all their own. Someone who looks like them, worries like them, fights like them, and, in the end, saves them. While this world may demand its specific service of black heroines, black girls deserve themselves. And as Oprah said of her own life’s work, black girls deserve “to say how we experience shame, how we love and how we rage, how we fail, how we retreat, persevere, and how we overcome.”

Black girls are ready, watching. And perhaps the world is afraid. It should be. ■

Victoria Newton Ford is a poet and essayist from the South, currently based in Washington, D.C. Her writing has appeared or is forthcoming in Connotations Press: An Online Artifact, Winter Tangerine, and LitHub.

Reviewed by Brian McLaren

A THEOLOGY OF LIFE AND DEATH

A Palestinian Theology of Liberation: The Bible, Justice, and the Palestine-Israel Conflict, by Naim Stifan Ateek. Orbis.

SOME YEARS AGO, I convened a trip to the so-called Holy Land. It was not a trip about “walking where Jesus walked,” although we did a lot of that. It was a trip to discover facts on the ground in the Israel-Palestine conflict and to meet Jewish, Muslim, and Christian peacemakers in the region. Our band of 20 or so was led by organizers Jeff and Janet Wright, passionate Christians who love the land and all its people.

Nearly everyone on the trip had a breakdown moment, when the tragedy of Israel-Palestine overwhelmed them. My wife, Grace, described a sudden feeling that she had spent her whole life in a totalitarian regime and that “what I thought of as news had really been propaganda all along.” The reality of Israel-Palestine was so different from what she had heard both in the Christian community and in the mass media that she was deeply shaken. We all felt that our trip had exposed so much of the so-called news we had heard from Israel-Palestine as prejudiced, one-sided, and intended to conceal more than reveal.

A trip highlight was a visit to the offices of Sabeel, the headquarters of Palestinian liberation theology, and a meeting with its founder Naim Ateek, a theological hero I’d admired from afar. What Desmond Tutu is to South African theology and Martin Luther King Jr. and James Cone are to North American black theology, Ateek is to Palestinian and Middle Eastern theology. I have since been honored to be an ally in the important work of Sabeel.

Ateek has written a definitive introduction to his work. *A Palestinian Theology of Liberation* will be especially helpful to three groups of people in the U.S.

Its largest audience: lay Christians of



conscience across denominations who care about theology, biblical studies, international relations, and social justice. Since Middle East policy is critical to every significant U.S. election, it only makes sense to hear the voice of a respected fellow Christian of Palestinian identity. (Sadly, too many U.S. Christians aren't even aware of the existence of the historic Christian community in Palestine and think all Arabs are Muslim.)

Second, Christian pastors, teachers, and seminarians will derive special benefit from this volume. If they are unfamiliar with liberation theology, *A Palestinian Theology of Liberation* will simultaneously introduce them to the general field and to its unique Palestinian expression.

As preachers, they will benefit greatly from Ateek's reflections on scripture. American fans of writers such as Rachel Held Evans, Peter Enns, Walter Brueggemann (who wrote the foreword), Brian Zahnd, Shane Claiborne, Rob Bell, and Tony Campolo will find in Ateek a theologian who engages with the scriptures in the same promising way—with the added urgency of living in a context where how one interprets the Bible is, literally, a matter of life and death.

In the middle chapters of the book, Ateek engages directly and powerfully with what are often called “texts of terror,” passages that advocate genocide and crimes against humanity in the name of God. As one whom some present-day Jews and Christians would subject to ethnic cleansing in God's name, Ateek interprets these texts with both scholarly precision and personal passion.

Third, the most difficult but perhaps most important audience for this book will be U.S. Christian Zionists, followers of John Hagee, Jerry Falwell, Franklin Graham, Mike Huckabee, and their political and religious allies in the Religious Right. I hope that Christians in the first two categories will read this book, pass it on to their Christian Zionist friends and relatives, and invite them to discuss it together.

Short of taking a field trip to the region, reading *A Palestinian Theology of Liberation* is the next best thing. ■

Brian D. McLaren is an author, speaker, activist, and public theologian. His most recent book is *The Great Spiritual Migration*.

Reviewed by Mallory McDuff

JOY AS SOCIAL CHANGE

Radio Free Vermont: A Fable of Resistance, by Bill McKibben. Blue Rider Press.

IT FEELS GOOD to laugh out loud.

In the past year I haven't felt light-hearted about weighty topics such as our political leadership, globalization, and climate change. But Bill McKibben's latest book, *Radio Free Vermont*, reminds me that humor can be as powerful as protest in speaking truth to both injustice and abuse of power.

Prolific writer, climate organizer, *Sojourners* columnist, and co-founder of the organization 350.org, McKibben has given his life to galvanizing the climate movement. He advocates for a diversity of strategies, from a carbon tax to public art, with a seriousness reflecting the high stakes of inaction. In his first work of fiction, the satirical plot of *Radio Free Vermont* revolves around the exploits of Vern Barclay, a 72-year-old radio announcer who finds himself at the center of a campaign to convince Vermonters to secede from the U.S.

His motley crew of allies includes Perry Alterson, a teenager with technological expertise who ends every sentence with a question; Trance Harper, a former Olympic biathlon winner; and Sylvia Granger, a firefighter who harbors these fugitives while teaching investment bankers and corporate attorneys how to drive in the mud and fell trees for firewood in their new state.

The narrative begins with acts of non-violent and almost joy-filled resistance by the accidental activists, which include taking over the airwaves at Starbucks with *Radio Free Vermont* (“underground,

underpowered, and underfoot”) and the rather polite hijacking of a Coors Light truck to replace the cargo with Vermont craft beers (which are mentioned by name in nearly every chapter). It's like the Vermont Welcome Wagon received training in civil disobedience, with a local brew never far from reach.

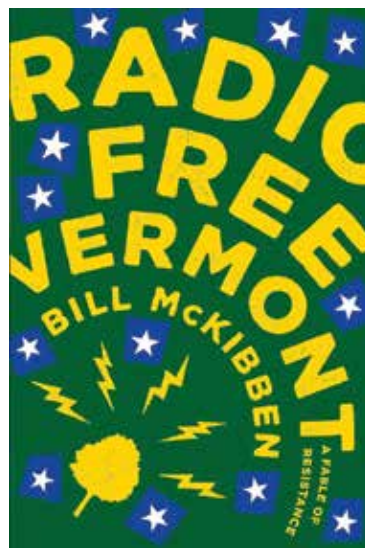
The campaign gains momentum when Barclay covers the opening of a Walmart and becomes partners in crime with the young Alterson, who engineers a sewage system backflow into the new store.

With this corporate sabotage, the two are branded as terrorists, soon joined by Harper, who takes the spotlight at the governor's opening of an event facility with a retractable roof, by raising a flag of independence sewn by Barclay's 96-year-old mother.

What follows is a page-turning escape to protect small interests—community, land, farms, forests, and families. While in hiding with his crew, Barclay ponders the right direction for the small towns in his state. He recognizes that the problems faced by his team may not reflect the magni-

tude of challenges such as police brutality and voter suppression, but inaction on any scale feels like a cop-out to the country's inept leaders.

The annual town hall meetings become the focal point in the book for grassroots decision-making. One moral of this “fable” is to push us toward creative and civil resistance in the face of incompetent and ill-prepared leadership. I have to wonder: In towns more



One moral of this “fable” is to push us toward creative and civil resistance.

diverse than rural Vermont, what are the vehicles—beyond the ballot—for creating accessible, collective resistance that matters? How do we build coalitions such as the Moral Mondays movement in North Carolina that bind together our diverse acts of resistance, all of which have meaning? Perhaps one critical point of this book is that we must continue to organize and resist, even while living into the questions.

I was reminded of McKibben's 2010 visit to the college where I teach, a mere four days before his Global Work Party to confront climate change, with more than 7,000 concurrent events across the world. My students and I left his lecture feeling the enormous gravity

of the mission. Eight years later, I hear an additional message from this book: We need to be vigilant in our resistance and maintain a lighthearted spirit in the work. At a time when it truly matters, *Radio Free Vermont* left me smiling, rather than downtrodden. And given his history of persistence, I like to imagine McKibben writing this book, chuckling about a quirky detail, and then taking a sip of a Vermont IPA. ■

Mallory McDuff teaches at Warren Wilson College in Asheville, N.C. She is the author of three books: Natural Saints, Sacred Acts, and Conservation Education and Outreach Techniques.

Reviewed by Jeff Hoagland

GENERATIONS OF FAITH

Millennials and the Mission of God: A Prophetic Dialogue, by Andrew F. Bush and Carolyn C. Wason. Wipf and Stock.

THIS BOOK SURPRISED me. *Millennials and the Mission of God* incarnates the “prophetic dialogue” of the subtitle. There are many books *about* millennials, but here a representative speaks for herself and an older interlocutor listens and responds to the concerns and arguments voiced. Together, baby boomer Andrew Bush and millennial Carolyn Wason ponder the future of the church, how Christianity is changing, and how to engage millennials.

Those with no affiliation, the Nones, are growing; traditional ministry models are failing. Wason, with her background in anthropology, sheds light on why. Her prose is playful and filled with self-deprecation as she laughs at her generation's idiosyncrasies. As she muses on hashtag activism

leveraging an ill-gotten Christian privilege, many millennials retreat from traditional evangelizing.

For Wason, the question of faith is not “Is it true?” but rather, “Does it matter?” Thus, her doubts and questions center not on the Bible's veracity, but on the influence of the church on the world. Her observations will resonate with many millennials.

Bush, ever the professor, guides the conversation along a narrative and missiological reading of the Bible. For

him, mission is driven by a biblical mandate, but not just “make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19). The whole biblical narrative tells the story of a God who calls people both to evangelism and to seeking social justice.

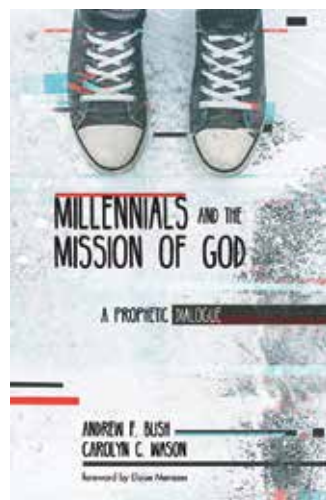
Despite this wide view of mission, Bush struggles to understand the millennial need for relevance over truth; at times he cannot grasp what Wason means by doubting her faith in terms of its capacity to establish justice.

Bush journeyed from hippie to Pentecostal—from a political radical to traditional missionary. He recognizes how his generation's reversal contributes to millennials' disillusionment. Perhaps if much of the boomer generation had not retreated from the prophetic call, assimilating into U.S. dominant culture, millennials would not feel burdened and even repulsed by an irrelevant church.

However, Bush and Wason agree on much. Through their conversations, they offer each other, and by extension the reader, a vision of what ministry could look like moving forward. Both Bush and Wason understand the power of narrative. Bush uses the biblical narrative as a lens to understand the purpose of mission; Wason notes how millennials see personal narrative as a reliable source of truth. Both take the time to tell their own stories, how they came to faith, and the influences that have deeply affected their spiritual journeys, showing the reader how they approach the

problems at hand.

The book does not offer answers so much as perform the struggle many churches must take on to reach the next generation. Listening closely to another across a cultural divide is difficult, and the first few chapters are slow going as the authors position themselves and begin the work of listening. Underneath a discussion of culture and faithful practice is the faithful discernment



of what the mission of God is and how the church will participate.

Hence my surprise. At a time when many expect the church to die, *Millennials and the Mission of God* shows that true dialogue can happen. People divided by generations and different cultural backgrounds can come together to forge a path forward for the church. The book bears witness to how the church may indeed be surprised by the hope of deeper listening. ■

Jeff Hoagland is the Sojourners communications intern.

For Wason, the question of faith is not “Is it true?” but rather, “Does it matter?”

and Harry Potter, she is frank, openly discussing the role fear plays in millennial evangelism. The long history of Christians oppressing people of other faiths weighs heavily on the shoulders of this emerging generation. Afraid of unconsciously

Wrestling

Continued from Page 35

health-care system that has failed, even harmed, them in the past. They distrust the safeguards against misuse and coercion that end-of-life law advocates say will prevent abuse. But as fervent Christians, they trust God. They remind him, Smith says, of his great grandmother, who believed that “to choose death is not up to her, it’s up to God.”

Rick Reinhard



Smith agrees—with a twist. To him, God is always in charge because “God knows and acts when we give our consent to the Angel of Death.”

In his study, in Gaithersburg, Md., he keeps a photo of a rural cabin where a poor black woman might have lived her last hours because it reminds him of the poem “Go Down, Death,” by James Weldon Johnson, the composer of “Lift Every Voice and Sing.”

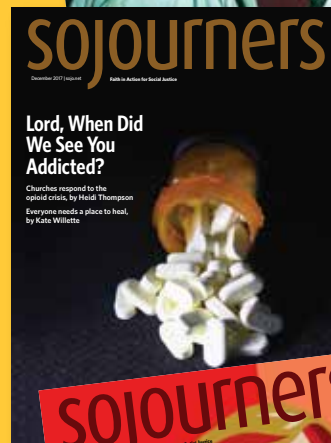
In the poem, the Almighty’s heart is touched by “Sister Caroline” on her bed of pain:

*And God said: Go down, Death, go down,
Go down to Savannah, Georgia,
Down in Yamacraw,
And find Sister Caroline.
She’s borne the burden and heat of the day,
She’s labored long in my vineyard,
And she’s tired —
She’s weary —
Go down, Death, and bring her to me. ■*

Cathy Lynn Grossman, former national religion reporter for USA Today and for Religion News Service, has a special interest in ethics and biomedical issues.

3 WAYS

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Resurrection Spaces

THE WHOLE CHRISTIAN YEAR stretches toward this moment when we reach back to acclaim the power of God over death manifest in the resurrected life of Jesus. The passion and pageantry of the days from Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday enable believers to mystically live in the ancient moments we commemorate. At the same time, we are very much present in a world that is anything but resurrected; it is, as I often preach, “crucified and crucifying.” It is easy to find the broken places in our world and those that deal death. Where are the resurrection spaces? Where do we look to see that death does not, in fact, have the last word? What is our work in bridging the gap between death and life?

This month’s lessons brim with passionate faith on Jesus and his triumph over the grave. These accounts stem from nearly a century and more past the events that inspire their faith. The authors and editors of these texts also lived in a world in which the triumph of the resurrection was not apparent in many aspects of their lives; many went to grue-

some deaths confident in the resurrection despite the power the empire wielded over their mortal lives. To strengthen our faith, they left us the accounts in the scriptures we read in this season. But we are not dependent on their words. We have unmediated access to the love and power of the resurrected Jesus.



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[APRIL 1]

The Death of Death

Isaiah 25:6-9; Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; Acts 10:34-43; Mark 16:1-8

THE PROMISE OF Easter is life—life that transcends death. Faith in resurrection is central to most traditions of Christianity and Islam and to some movements of Judaism. References to life after death are rare before the Newer Testament; Daniel 12:2-3 is the clearest example of eternal life after death and resurrection. In the story of the martyrdom of a mother and her seven sons (2 Maccabees 7:7-14), the sons affirm their belief in being raised to everlasting life. There is also a Hebrew biblical tradition of an underworld, Sheol, the abode of the dead, particularly the wicked (Psalm 9:17), from which the dead are said not to rise again (Job 7:9), though other texts differ (for example, Psalm 30:3). What is constant in the scriptures is the power of God over death.

Isaiah 25:6-9 is the first reading for Easter because of its explicit claim that God “will destroy (or “swallow”) death forever” (25:8). The promise is specific: “on this mountain,” it says in verses 6, 7, and 10. That “mountain” is Jerusalem, figuratively Mount Zion. It is the scene for a banquet

the likes of which the world has never seen, the richest and most fat-filled—a good thing here—accompanied by the finest wines. The banquet symbolizes joy, delight, and deep satisfaction. The feast is open to all peoples (verse 6), just as death has touched all peoples and all nations (verse 7). In Isaiah, God’s promise of a joyful life beyond the grasp of death is for all peoples, all nations, without precondition.

[APRIL 8]

How Shall We Live?

Acts 4:32-35; Psalm 133; 1 John 1:1 - 2:2; John 20:19-31

BECOMING CHURCH in Acts 4 looks quite different than it does in chapters 1 and 2. People in the street under the power of the Holy Spirit living into their gifts have been replaced by the early Christian commune. The result was that everyone “among them,” that is in the nascent Christian community, had all their needs met (4:34-35). That is a

very difficult form of church to sell in this world. It was hard then. The next few verses tell of a couple who defrauded the church. We also know of cults in which members are pressured to give all they have to enrich an unscrupulous few claiming divine authority.

The holy example in Acts 4 need not be consigned to the dustbins of the outdated and impractical ministry ideas. There is a metaphorical “country mile” between giving everything one owns and leaving the poor and needy to their own fates. Acts 4 is a reminder that we, the church, are responsible for each other, that we have it within our power to make a significant difference in their lives. Yet Acts 4 only addresses need in the understandably insular first church. Today we must also see the need around us. The needs of our fellow human kin are ours to meet, whether they are Christian or not.

[APRIL 15]

Denouncing Anti-Judaism

Acts 3:12-19; Psalm 4; 1 John 3:1-7; Luke 24:36b-48

ANTI-JUDAISM IS a long-held failing of the church and its interpretation of the scriptures. Christian anti-Judaism takes many forms: blaming the Jews for killing Jesus; denigrating Judaism as a legalistic works-based religion; claiming that Christians have replaced Jews in God’s favor; diminishing or erasing Jesus’ Jewish identity; characterizing Jesus’ ministry and message as independent from and oppositional to (first-century) Judaism, etc. Some of these notions have roots in Christian scriptures; all have been amplified though interpretation in preaching, teaching, and theological discourse. The result of the church’s propagation of anti-Judaism has resulted in lethal persecution of Jews, vandalism, theft, and disenfranchisement “perpetrated in Christian lands by Christian hands,” as scripture scholar Johanna van Wijk-Bos puts it. The most notorious of this persecution was enacted by the Nazis—including self-identified Christians and notable pastors and scholars of religion. (I recommend *The Aryan*

Jesus, by Susannah Heschel.)

The claim in Acts 3:13-14 that the Israelites rejected and handed over Jesus and killed him (verse 15) is part of a collection of biblical passages that place blame for the death of Jesus on the Jews. Those texts include Matthew 27:25, where the crowd says, “his blood be on us and on our children”; John 8:39-44, where Jesus tells some Jews that they are not children of Abraham but children of the devil; and 1 Thessalonians 2:14-15, where the author says plainly that the Jews killed Jesus. Jewish New Testament scholar Amy-Jill Levine (see *The Misunderstood Jew*) calls for Christian interpreters of these verses to do more than contextualize and historicize, but to theologize: “Christians must denounce anti-Jewish readings (however defined) because they are counter to the “good news” of Jesus,” writes Levine.

[APRIL 22]

The Other Sheep

Acts 4:5-12; Psalm 23; 1 John 3:16-24; John 10:11-18

JESUS SURRENDERED his life, according to 1 John 3:16 and John 10:1. This is in sharp contrast to Acts 4:10 this week and Acts 3:13-15 last week (both of which indict the Jews, but not the Romans, for Jesus’ execution). First John 3 is an extended treatise on the love of God for us and the love we ought to have one another. It is directed to the Christian community. Verses 23 and 24 describe the parameters of this community, belief in Jesus, and love for one another. Notably missing are all the doctrinal, cultural, theological, and interpretive issues that Christians use to divide ourselves into camps.

In John 10, Jesus claims the mantle of the good shepherd. To those who think they and only people who think, theologize, and interpret like them are in the fold, Jesus says, “I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So, there will be one flock, one shepherd” (verse 16). There has been great speculation on the identity of these others. Such speculation misses the point. God’s love is broader than we can imagine and includes those we can’t imagine.

[APRIL 29]

Queerly Diverse

Acts 8:26-40; Psalm 22:25-31; 1 John 4:7-21; John 15:1-8

IN EASTERTIDE, the church grows as the gospel spreads. The burgeoning ancient church described in Acts 8 is culturally and sexually diverse. Philip, possibly the disciple of Jesus with a Greek name who served as a cultural and linguistic bridge between Aramaic-speaking Jesus and the Greeks, extended the gospel to a Nubian official from what is now Sudan. The inclusion of each person in the Jesus movement is significant. Philip with his Greek name represents a significant departure from the rabid anti-Hellenism of the Maccabees. Even if he was Jewish, he would not have been Jewish enough for some. The African official is the treasurer of his sovereign, the Kandake (origin of the name Candace).

He is also embodied in a way that defies binaries. As a eunuch, he was neither fully male nor female—a third way of being. The Torah prohibited him from the temple (Leviticus 21:20; Deuteronomy 23:1), but Isaiah called for the full inclusion of eunuchs (Isaiah 56:3-5).

Two thousand years later, some are arguing about whether people who don’t fit gender binaries are welcome in the church. Too many churches fail to reflect the rich diversity found in the church in Acts with “Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea, and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs” together (Acts 2:9-11). ■

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A Heartfelt Apology from Wells Fargo

WHEN I RECEIVED an email from the president of Wells Fargo bank—expressing remorse for years of financial malfeasance—I looked forward to reading words crafted by highly paid public relations professionals. Given the depth of the bank's abhorrent irregularities—such as altering depositors' records and pressuring employees to open bogus accounts—Wells Fargo needed to set just the right tone when apologizing to a potential nationwide jury pool (and feeling the squeeze from several boycotts).

But I set the email aside. At that moment, I was preoccupied with helping my granddaughter negotiate the new challenges of first grade. Unfortunately, this critical time in a child's life is not helped by the institutional bias of public schools against adult family members sitting in the classroom. (I even offered to bring my own chair.) From that vantage point I could have guided my granddaughter's tentative first steps in establishing enduring social relationships. ("Don't sit next to that girl. Powerpuff Girls lunch boxes are SO last century.") But this was not allowed.

As a consolation, I was told, I'd be welcome at something called



you prefer, a Remora Grandfather, named after a creature that attaches itself to the sides of large fish, feasting off parasites. This can be of benefit to the host, particularly during recess when the remora could make sure the granddaughter gets a turn on the swings. (When you've got a remora attached to you, people tend to get out of the way.)

Obviously, I care a great deal about this child and have contributed much to her future, including money for her college. This money, however, will not be deposited in a Wells Fargo bank.

RETURNING TO THE email from Wells Fargo's president, Tim Sloan, I noticed it also included a video, which I opened immediately because you never know when there'll be a cute puppy. Videos are particularly useful for executives when conveying contrition, because they display facial expressions so critical when atoning for egregious misconduct, not to mention

support of the Dakota Pipeline and private prisons. (And he got through the whole thing without winking.)

On the screen was a handsome, middle-aged man with piercing eyes and a full head of graying hair. (Why do bankers get to have hair and not art directors of religious magazines?! *Talking to You, Yahweh.*)

Sloan's message seemed heartfelt, or as heartfelt as one can be after the dozen run-throughs his consultants probably insisted on before the final edit. Fortunately, his weariness

from the exercise was eased by an annual compensation package of more than \$13 million. (Hey, I get it. When you're rich, you've got expenses.)

Despite the apology, the revelations of criminal conduct should have prompted me to withdraw my funds in protest and deposit them in a small community bank. (Did I say "funds"? If that implies multiples of dollars, then I should have said "fund.") But in my defense, many years ago it *was* a small, community bank, before it was absorbed by increasingly larger banks over time. My account number hasn't changed, only the names of successive banks whose growing size correlated with their accelerating—and unpunished—breaches of the public trust.

But Wells Fargo has a stagecoach on its logo. I like stagecoaches.

SO I ASSUAGE my guilt by savoring a meeting I had recently with a Wells Fargo investment adviser. After receiving a statement on the interest earned from my savings account, I made an appointment to determine the best way to invest this windfall: stocks, bonds, or perhaps a balanced portfolio of various financial products. I was welcomed into his office, offered coffee, and then complimented on my fiscal prudence. "Just how much money are we talking about?" he inquired, smiling, and offering me a complimentary Wells Fargo pen.

I smiled back and handed him the printout showing that, in the last quarter, I had earned .07 cents in interest. Then I giggled. Because this was funny, right?

Not really, he replied, abruptly ending our meeting.

But I kept that new pen. It has a stagecoach on it. ■

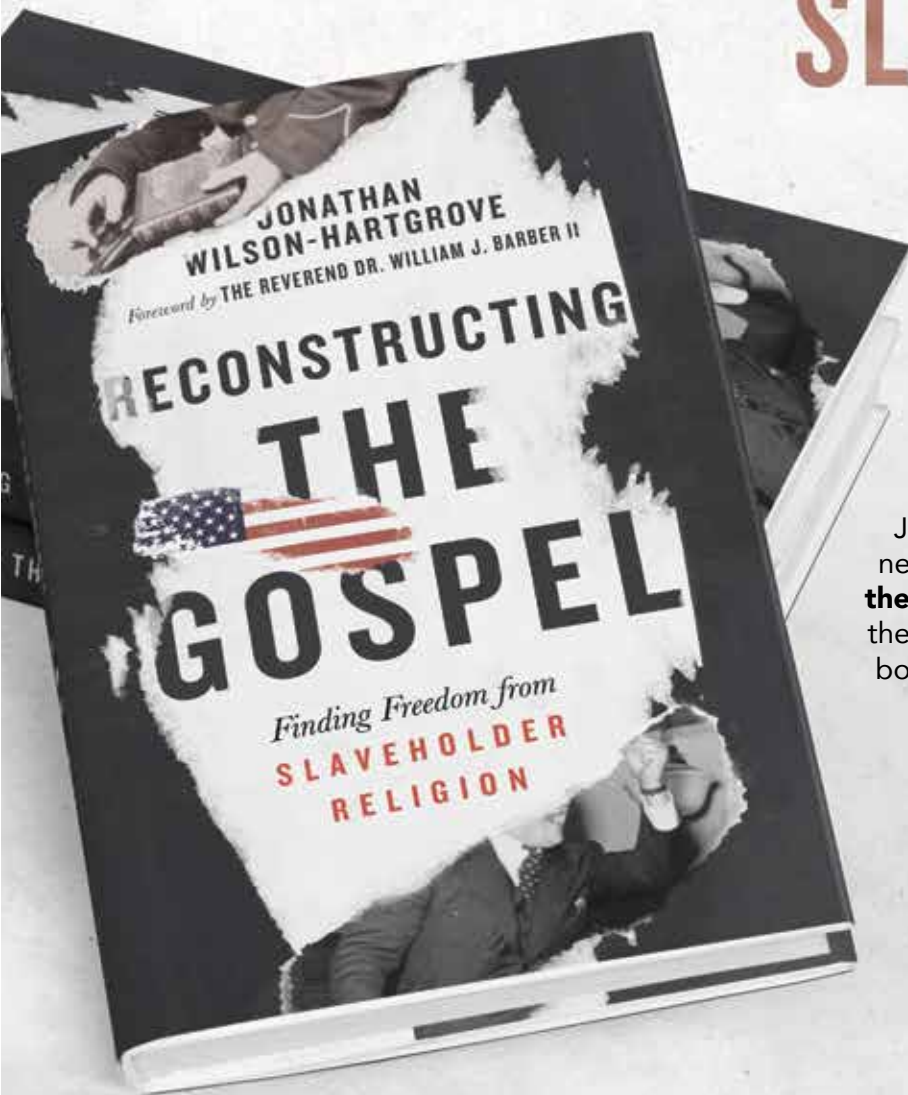
Ed Spivey Jr. is art director of Sojourners.

Well, okay then. That makes it all better.

"Family Day," a dubious-sounding event of unspecified significance scheduled for the distant future. I had assumed that, given the frequency of parent-teacher conferences, there would also be grandparent-teacher conferences on the school calendar. But no.

I admit I've been labeled a Helicopter Grandparent. But I scoff, and point out that helicopters occasionally leave the ground. Me, I never get that far away. I'm more like a Wetsuit Grandfather or, if

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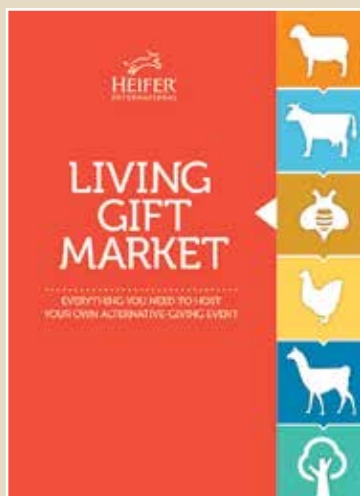


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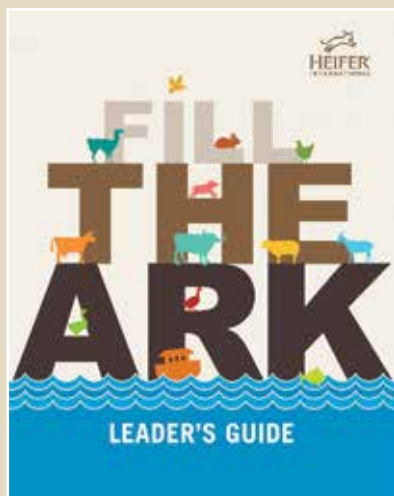
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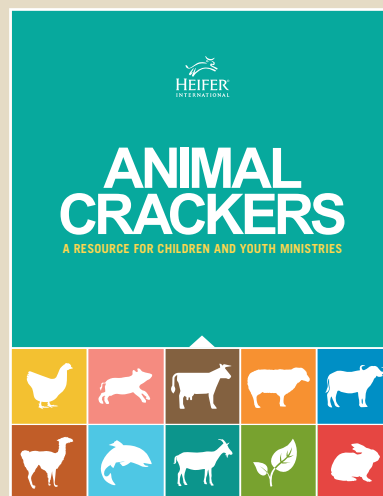
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